

Jesus is more than a teacher or prophet; He manifests the power of God!

**23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 6, 2009**

There is much more going on in today's Gospel passage than is immediately apparent to us, but would have been perceived by the crowd around Jesus, and also the people for whom Mark wrote his Gospel. The setting is the district of the Decapolis. This area of the ten cities is a gentile area, rather notorious by reputation, and not home to many Jews. It is very likely that the deaf man brought to Jesus was a gentile. This may be why Jesus took the man off alone, away from the crowd who had followed Him from Tyre and Sidon. For Him to touch the Gentile in the ways He did would by Jewish law render Jesus unclean. And while Jesus would not deliberately scandalize His followers, His compassion for the man was more important to Him than following laws of ritual purity. This would have been an important message for the gentiles, as well as the Jews, in the early Christian community.

The description of the healing would also have spoken eloquently to the Jews who were familiar with the Torah. Jesus puts His fingers in the man's ears, and mingles His spittle to reshape the man's tongue. This calls to mind the image in Genesis of God forming Adam from the clay of the earth. Jesus is re-shaping what has been impaired. He has the power of the Creator, and is re-shaping creation after the fall. He speaks a single word of command, and brings about the healing, just as God brought creation into being by a word of command. This is why the crowd is so excited. Jesus is more than a teacher or prophet; He manifests the power of God!

For the early Christians, this more than a healing story. This is a revelation of the Son of God beginning to make all things new. Perhaps that is why they incorporated the "Ephphatha blessing" in the ancient baptismal ritual, one more sign of a new beginning, a new creation, effected in the sacrament.

God bless you.

Fr. Pat