

**Reflection on the Gospel-23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B  
(Mark 7:31-37)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

From September 1 to October 4, we join with Christians across the globe in celebrating the Season of Creation. The 2021 theme, “A Home for All, Renewing the *Oikos* [household] of God” invites us to attend to those rendered homeless, birds and beasts and humankind alike so that there might be a home for all the species of the earth. Today’s gospel draws attention to the profoundly deaf who find themselves on the edge of the earth community. Without access to birdsong, to spoken discourse, to music and to the vast range of media communication, they often struggle to understand and to be understood. Their capacity to communicate their deepest wisdom, their hopes and dreams, their anxieties and fears, is limited not only by personal disability but also by the incomprehension and impatience of others.

Whatever degree of deafness is experienced, relief from such an affliction offers far more than physical healing. It brings insertion into the life of family, community, workplace and the wonderful world of God’s other than human creation. It opens up new horizons and unimagined possibilities. Sophisticated hearing aids and cochlear implants can transform the lives of those who suffer from serious hearing loss. We give thanks for the earth elements in cochlear implants, the silicone, platinum, titanium and ceramics and the rare earth elements in hearing aids.

In first century Palestine, chances of relief from hearing deficiency and associated speech impairment were minimal. Desperate people put their faith in folk healers who used their healing hands and drew upon their knowledge of the medicinal properties in certain herbs and other plants. Many turned to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, or his daughter Hygieia. Jesus was an effective healer who used some of the same methods as other healers of his time. He turns to the God of Israel (“looking up to heaven...”) as the source of healing power.

There is layer upon layer of meaning in today’s healing story. Habitat features significantly. Jesus travels from Tyre on the northern Mediterranean coast to the Sea of Galilee via the non-Jewish territory on the eastern side of the lake. The gospel writer is stressing the all-embracing nature of Jesus’ healing ministry. Land belongs to God and territorial claims on land are no barrier to Jesus’ healing ministry, a lesson Jesus himself has just learned from the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mark 7:26-30.

In Mark’s gospel, the healing power of God is available to Jews and Gentiles, male and female, young and old alike. It is available to those with bodily afflictions and to those who are paralysed by anxiety and fear. There is irony in the telling of the story: a Gentile deaf man can be brought from no hearing to hearing, from “speaking with difficulty” to clarity of speech, but Jesus’ own disciples will shortly fail to hear and understand, “Do you have ears and not hear?” (Mark 8:18). Let us open our ears to hear in the hope that we might understand what we have done to our planetary home and how we might renew the *oikos* of God.