



a Kendall Hunt Company

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, Junior High - RCLB Lectionary



Junior High Session

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Mark 7:31-37

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

God of compassion,

When we are in pain, you hear our cries for help.

You long to bring an end to all suffering.

Help us to become more aware of the poverty
and injustices that cause suffering in our world today,
so that we can be instruments of your healing.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Opening Life Reflection

Fear is a strong emotion that can keep us trapped within ourselves. It helps to look at our fears so that with God's help we can have some control over them. Discuss:

- Have you ever been unable to do something because you were afraid?
- When is fear a good thing?
- When is fear destructive?

Silently reflect for a moment on what fears hold you back from doing the things that you want or need to do.

- Can you think of a time when you did not let fear keep you from doing something? If so, how did that affect you?

Close the discussion by playing the song "Be Not Afraid" by Bob Dufford, SJ. Emphasize that we can face our fears with the confidence that God will be with us.

Listening to the Word of God

In the first reading, listen to hear why we should not be fearful.

Read Isaiah 35:4-7a.

Allow for silence.

Scripture Discussion Starters

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- What message is given to the fearful of heart?
 - According to this reading, what has God has come to do?
 - What images of God come across in this reading?

In the Gospel listen to how Jesus responds to our suffering.

Read Mark 7:31-37.

Allow for silence.

- What did the man who was brought to Jesus suffer from?
- How did Jesus heal the man?
- What did Jesus say to open the man's ears?
- Did Jesus want the people who witnessed the man's recovery to tell anyone?
- Did the people listen to Jesus?

Scripture Background

Provide 2-3 minutes of background information on the readings using the Catechist Background section.

"Fear not" is the message we find in the first reading. God has come to save us. Today's passage from Isaiah brings the hopeful news that we have no need to fear because God is with us. And God's presence alleviates all suffering and rids the world of evil.

God's plan for salvation continues with the life death and resurrection of Jesus. The ministry and works of Jesus are signs of God's reign on earth. In the gospel today, Jesus responds to a deaf mute with compassion and a healing touch. The action of Jesus is very physical. He sticks his fingers into the man's ears, spits on his tongue and then say's the word "Ephphatha" which means, "be opened". Immediately the man's ears are opened and he is able to speak plainly.

Jesus' act of curing the man in the story is a miracle which points out the truth that Jesus has come to restore the world. Jesus is the very presence of God on earth. Those who witness Jesus healing the man are amazed by the event. Jesus urges them to keep it a secret. Jesus did not want his actions to be misunderstood. But the people who saw the miracle could not keep silent. They went on to spread the great news.

Questions for Deeper Reflection

- Aside from physical deafness, can people be in need of having their ears opened? Explain.

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- Did you ever hear of anyone being miraculously healed of an illness?
- Can Jesus work miracles today?
- Name some ways that you can help to bring Jesus' healing presence into the world?

(If you are not going to continue with the doctrinal discussion, proceed to the Gospel in Life.)

Doctrinal Discussion Starters

- What does it mean to say that God has entrusted the earth to us?
- What does it mean that God expects us to be good stewards?

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social teaching helps us live as agents of healing in our world today. It incorporates six broad themes. (1) The earth belongs to God and God entrusts the earth to us. We are called to be good stewards of the planet and all its resources. (2) The gift of the earth is for the whole of humanity. The distribution of goods for the health and benefit of all people is of primary importance. (3) Political authority has the duty to regulate the production of goods and services for the benefit of the common good. (4) To honor and respect the dignity of the human person and to work for peace and justice on behalf of the less fortunate. (5) To respect animals, plants and mineral resources as part of God's creation. (6) The Church makes moral judgments regarding economic and social matters because we are concerned with the common good.

The purpose of Catholic social teaching is to help us live the values and teachings of the Gospel. It provides guidelines so that we may truly live according to the example of Jesus. Jesus lived a life motivated by love and compassion. We do the same when we put aside greed and selfishness and live on behalf of the poor and most vulnerable.

- How can you become more aware of the needs of the poor?
- Name some ways that young people can work for justice. Give some examples of how young people are currently working for justice.

The Gospel in Life

Take a risk! Get to know someone different from you. Allow yourself to imagine what it would be like to walk in their shoes.