

COLUMNISTS

Jesus touches us through the sacraments

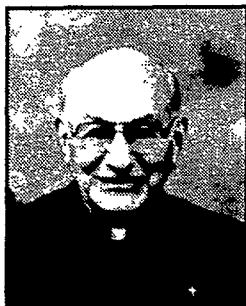
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 7:31-37. (R1) Isaiah 35:4-7. (R2) James 2:1-5.

Sunday's Gospel is about a physical healing that took place in Gentile territory, the district of the 10 cities — the Decapolis — on the eastern side of the Lake of Galilee.

Some people, friends of the afflicted man, brought a deaf, non-speaking man to Jesus that he might touch him.

Sensitive to the man's feelings, Jesus took him away from the crowd.

Since the man was deaf, Jesus used sign language. He put his fingers into the man's ear and, spitting, touched his tongue. Jesus was telling the man that he was going to do something about his impaired senses. Then Jesus looked up to heaven, so that the man might know from where help was coming. Finally Jesus emitted a groan, for the miseries of man always deeply pained Jesus. And whenever Jesus was deeply touched, He



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

would use his mother tongue, the Aramaic. Thus he said, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!"). At once the man's ears were opened; and he began to speak plainly.

The deaf man was brought to Jesus that he might touch him. Oh, the power in the touch of Jesus!

Paderewski by his touch could make a piano dance. Paganini by the touch of his hand could make a violin speak.

Michelangelo saw a block of marble and said to his friend, "There's an angel in that marble and I'm going to make him visible." And he did, by the touch of his hand.

The skillful hands of a surgeon can heal. The touch of a nurse's hand can soothe the fevered brow. The gentle touch of a friend's hand can calm a sorrowing heart or instill confidence into a faint one.

But the wonder of it all is that Jesus still touches us today. The touch of his hand are the seven sacraments!

A sacrament is simply an encounter with Christ through his ministers. To Sister Faustina, Jesus said, "In the confessional I am only hidden by the priest, but I myself act in the soul."

The sacraments are the touch of the Master's hand. And because behind the hand of the minister of the sacraments is the hand of Christ, the sacraments

can effect such wonderful changes in the human heart.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

- Monday, September 8**
Micah 5:1-4a or Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 or 1:18-23
- Tuesday, September 9**
Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 6:12-19
- Wednesday, September 10**
Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 6:20-26
- Thursday, September 11**
Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 6:27-38
- Friday, September 12**
1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-14; Luke 6:39-42
- Saturday, September 13**
1 Timothy 1:15-17; Luke 6:43-49

Fortitude is needed for growth

Fortitude, or courage, is the virtue by which we are able to take risks in the service of justice and truth, and to persist in the pursuit of what is right and just. It stands between two extremes: rashness on one side, and timidity on the other.

Fortitude is the power to withstand the inevitable shocks and setbacks of ordinary human existence. Without fortitude human growth is impossible.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said that whatever does not destroy us makes us stronger. What we successfully endure for the sake of justice and truth makes us better people.

The virtue of fortitude is lacking in people who are always in fear of displeasing others, especially those in authority over them. They do only whatever is "expected" or "safe." Thus, they remain silent in the face of injustices done to others. They shun conflict at all costs. As a result, they hide the truth and betray justice.

People with fortitude are able to endure serious challenges and pressures, including the most intense forms of social disapproval. They can face all kinds of dangers and threats for the sake of a just cause. The virtue of fortitude, therefore, has both an active and a passive side. The active side enables us to take bold action



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

for the sake of justice and truth. The passive side involves endurance of pain and distress for the sake of justice and truth.

But that passive side is not "merely" passivity. Gandhi and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. insisted that nonviolent resistance to injustice was still resistance, requiring courage and commitment.

In the Old Testament fortitude is linked with a strength that is rooted in the power of God. Thus, when Moses passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua, he urged him in the presence of the Israelites, "Be brave and steadfast, for you must bring this people into the land which the Lord swore to their fathers he would give them; you must put them in possession of their heritage. It is the Lord who marches before you; he will be with you and will nev-

er fail you or forsake you. So do not fear or be dismayed" (Dt 31:7-8).

The New Testament was equally emphatic about the importance of fortitude for the Christian life. "Be on your guard," Paul wrote, "stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13). When the disciples were being tossed about during a sudden storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus approached them on the waves and said, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid" (Mt 14:27).

The early church looked to Jesus as the model of courage. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, urged the Christian community to persevere "in running the race that lies before us." At the same time, they were to keep their eyes "fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith."

Jesus, knowing "the joy that lay before him ... endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:1-3).

The virtue of fortitude is closely linked with the virtue of truthfulness as well as of justice. In ordinary human experience, we are not often confronted with the danger of physical violence, but we are fre-

quently faced with the risk of embarrassment or loss of status if we tell the truth.

Jesus reminded his disciples that he came into the world "to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). Grace and truth came through him (1:17), and the knowledge of truth is promised to those who believe in him (8:32). The word that he brings is truth (17:17), and he is himself the truth (14:6). Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who guides us "to all truth" (16:13), and it is a truth that sets us free (8:32).

Almost no sin was condemned as vehemently by Jesus and the New Testament as that of hypocrisy. "They preach," Jesus said of the religious establishment, "but they do not practice" (Mt 23:3). Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy to his face because he had stopped eating with Gentiles out of fear of the ultraconservative Jewish Christians. Paul said that Peter, Barnabas and others in their company had violated "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14).

The virtue of truthfulness is really the virtue of integrity. And you can't have integrity without fortitude.

It is a virtue in too little supply these days, even in the church.

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