

SEPTEMBER 8 CARDINAL COLLINS

We read in the Gospel of Luke that at the beginning of the Lord's ministry, He went to the synagogue, opened up the prophet Isaiah's book, and spoke of how He had come, as prophesied by Isaiah, to set the downtrodden free and to proclaim liberty to captives. Indeed, that is the mission of the Lord: to set us free and to proclaim liberty—not simply in a political or physical sense, but freedom from our sins—the freedom of the children of God.

We often find ourselves enslaved by our own ego, collapsing into ourselves. We need to be freed from that, and through His life of self-sacrificing love and His death on the cross, the Lord has given us that freedom. We see this throughout the Gospels, and this year we reflect on the Gospel of Mark. Throughout the Gospels, we see the healing ministry of the Lord where people continually come to Him, and He frees them from their physical afflictions, even raising Lazarus from physical death.

Of course, that miracle only delays His physical death because Lazarus has a second funeral later on. All these acts of healing carried out by the Lord are signs of a deeper liberation—not merely freeing people from blindness, deafness, lameness, or other physical afflictions, but offering the freedom of the children of God, the freedom to live eternally, and the freedom to dwell with the Blessed Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This freedom comes to us from love when we turn away from our limitations and truly repent, for the kingdom of God is near at hand. Only then are we free, and the Lord gives us new life, a new life that is the blessing and grace we receive as disciples of the Lord Jesus. We see this in all the miracles of healing. Despite being physically healed, the people ultimately faced physical death; they came to the Lord afterward. Thus, these miracles are signs of something beyond themselves, and the Lord teaches us through them.

The miracles of the Lord serve as reminders, much like a piece of chalk once used by teachers on a blackboard, helping us see beyond the immediate. Let's consider today's reading, which describes one of the most fully detailed miracles of healing in the Gospels. We see the Lord returning to the region of Tyre, which means He is in Gentile territory. He is heading to the Decapolis, a place populated by Gentiles, not the Chosen People. In this act, He is freeing everyone from the limitation of His ministry being confined solely to the Chosen People; He is now among the pagans. They are going to receive His blessing.

They bring to Him a man who is deaf and has an impediment in his speech. In this instance, physical deafness is evident, but we also recognize deeper impediments in our ability to communicate and in our spiritual deafness. Remember Samuel's words: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." We need to listen to the Lord, and this physical healing of deafness symbolizes our deeper need for healing from spiritual deafness.

As they beg Him to lay His hands upon the man, Jesus takes him aside in private, puts His fingers into the man's ears, spat, touched his tongue, looked up to heaven, sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha"—meaning "Be opened." Immediately, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Here we see a fulfillment of the first reading from the prophet Isaiah: When the Messiah comes and we are freed from our burdens, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the mute will speak. This miracle is a physical affirmation of that prophecy, but it demands a deeper fulfillment in our own lives. We need to see the Lord, speak our faith, and hear the word of the Lord: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

These physical miracles speak to us of something much more profound that touches the heart. May we internalize this knowledge, articulate it on our lips, and live it in our hearts. We also take note of how our Lord operates; He does not merely think of healing and make it happen. He

engages physically: putting His fingers in the man's ears, applying saliva to his tongue, using words, and sighing.

This act is very physical because we are physical beings, and God meets us at our level. It is very sacramental. To this day, when the Lord heals us of deeper illnesses beyond the physical ones, such as hardness of heart and selfishness, He does so in ways we can recognize and understand. We are not angels; we are human; we are physical. Thus, He consistently comes to us in sacramental ways.

The physical nature of this healing reminds us of the healing He offers us through the sacraments and the Word of God that is proclaimed. Jesus is Lord; He is with us, coming to set the downtrodden free and proclaim liberty to captives. We are often held captive by our ego and sinfulness. He calls out, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near at hand."

This proclamation marks the beginning of His ministry and mission to us. Today, we celebrate not only the physical miracle—a great blessing for the man who received it—but also the symbol of the greater freedom that comes to us from our Lord Jesus Christ.