

Rev. Mark J. Vyverman
Homily for 23rd Sunday B
September 4/5 Labor Day Weekend 2021

As we celebrate this Labor Day weekend, we might think a little bit about work. Instead, we often think of this weekend as the last chance at Summer and a little time off before we enter into the Fall routine. If we do spend a minute thinking about work, we realize that it is not only a practical aspect of life that supports us and our families and puts food on the table, but work can give us dignity, purpose, and fulfillment. I look back at the example that my parents and aunts and uncles gave me. They all worked hard in life, and they took that extra effort to do a good job. Their example is something that has guided me throughout life and has helped me in my priesthood and ministry.

As we look at our readings this weekend, let's go one step further and ask this question of ourselves: How hard do we work in our life of faith? Perhaps Isaiah gives us a little insight into our answer. He writes: "Thus say the Lord: Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes to save you." When we put our hearts into our faith and work on our relationship with God, we experience a strength and peace that we cannot find anywhere else. Compare this to a work environment. We can work hard; we can work long hours, but businesses can still close down and people lose their jobs, no matter how hard they try. Many of us witnessed that in the past year with the pandemic. Businesses that were once successful can no longer make it. With God, things are very different.

We certainly witness this in the Gospel. Jesus has traveled to the district of the Decapolis. There we find a deaf man with a speech impediment. As we look at the Gospel, we realize how much this man must have been loved and cared for by his community. The people brought him to Jesus and begged him to lay his hands on the deaf man. They had faith and knew what Jesus could do. It's no surprise then that Jesus turns to the Father for healing. Yet the method Jesus uses is most unusual. He put his finger into the ears, spits, touches his tongue, and commands the ears to be opened. Certainly not what one would expect. This kind of healing could only be done by faith and in the name of the Lord. We are told how this man's ears were immediately opened and his speech impediment was removed. As those people who brought this deaf man to Jesus realized, what they had asked for in faith had been given: This man could now hear and speak. And now comes my

favorite part of many of the Gospels regarding healing: Jesus orders them not to tell anyone what had happened. But the more that Jesus says this to the people, the more that their hearts are filled with joy and amazement at what had happened and they go around telling everyone who would listen: “He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Pondering this Gospel, let us think about the ways that our work each day can also turn into works of faith. As the people in this town brought the deaf man to Jesus, how can we bring those around us to Jesus for healing, for mercy, for His love? May the Lord bless us in the work we do each day, that our labors may bring us and those around us, closer to Him.