

## Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

Is 35:4-7a

Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

Jas 2:1-5

Mk 7:31-37

Paul W. Galetto, O.S.A.

Not many of us are deaf, but the number of people that is hard of hearing can be as numerous as the sands of the seashore. I am not talking in the clinical sense as much as I am in the practical sense. Ask someone to take out the trash and it like speaking to a wall. Seek volunteers to weed the garden and the silence could be deafening. Mention that someone has to clean his or her room and you would think that everyone is wearing earplugs (actually, they probably are – the ones attached to the iPod).

It is not only requests to do work that fall on deaf ears. Sometimes we are oblivious to the sounds of success, the words of encouragement, the pieces of advice that can change our lives. One such case in point is seen in the movie “Invincible.” This is the story of Vincent Papale, a south Philadelphia native that went from zero to hero when he took a one-in-a-million chance and made the roster of the Philadelphia Eagles as a walk-on. During the mid-seventies America was in an economic slump; unemployment was high, life in the inner city was difficult and for the unskilled laborer opportunities were few. Papale was an underemployed bartender whose wife left him because he was headed nowhere. She took all the furniture from their row home and left behind a note that said Papale would never amount to anything. It was this note that hung over his head like the sword of Damocles. He kept it with him wherever he went. He took it with him to his tryout for the Eagles. It was with him the day he played his first professional game (which turned out to be a disaster). It wasn’t until he ripped that note to shreds and fully and faithfully came to believe in himself that he had his breakout game. It was like Jesus saying to the man in today’s Gospel, “Ephphatha – Be opened.”

In our world, it is not the physical healing that Jesus performed that we are called to imitate; rather, our act of healing is a practical one, a daily one, a more immediate one. When someone receives bad news and closes out the world around them we are called to say, “Ephphatha – Be opened.” When someone is rejected by their peers or friends that they loved and feels that no one cares for them we recite, “Ephphatha – Be opened.” When someone who knows the truth has been silenced because no one respects his or her opinion, we must cry out, “Ephphatha – Be opened.” The way we say, “Be opened,” is by saying the words of encouragement that others need to hear.

What Vince Papale did in his simple yet profound act was not a self-serving situation; rather it gave hope to others like him. If one could do it, then others too. By opening himself up to belief he healed a wounded soul, a broken spirit, a forgotten man.

Movies such as “Invincible” are regular fare: “Cinderella Man,” “Seabiscuit,”

“Remember the Titans,” “The Rookie,” “The Miracle” and on and on. Why can’t we get enough of these films? Because we know the truth of what Jesus did, he gave voice to the downtrodden; he opened the ears of those who had been walled in silence by being marginalized by society.

We need to be both the one who is healed and the one who heals. We are to hear the cries of the poor. Open our ears, our hearts and our minds to the plight of those around us. We are to speak about the injustices that afflict our world; we are not to sit as if we were mute when we can speak and make a difference. But if we are to be healed, then we must heal others. Pull the earphones from those who are listening to destructive and pessimistic lyrics. Say the good things, the words of hope that people need to hear. Call to participation those who are sitting idle on the sidelines of life. Let others hear, let others speak and in doing so they will say again, “That one does all things well; the deaf hear and the dumb speak.”