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## Showing Off or Compassion? The Miracles of Jesus

*by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio*



There is little doubt, even in the minds of agnostic historians, that Jesus worked miracles. After all, the disturbing nature of his miracles were one of the main reasons he was put to death. He healed on the Sabbath, breaking a rabbinical regulation against medical “work” on the day of rest. He caused a sensation by raising Lazarus in a town just outside of Jerusalem—too close for comfort as far as the Chief Priests and Pharisees were concerned.

But the question is: Why did he work miracles? Did he really care about the individuals he fed, healed, and delivered from evil? Or was he just trying to make a statement?

This Sunday’s gospel helps us answer this question— it reveals that his miracles were truly miracles of mercy. Jesus encounters a deaf-mute in his travels. He does not make a spectacle of himself. No grandstanding, no fanfare. In fact, Jesus takes him away from the crowd, off by himself. And once the deaf-mute is healed, Jesus commands him not to tell anyone about it. Of course, the man is too ecstatic to keep the good news to himself. But the situation makes clear Jesus’ primary and unwavering commitment to relieve suffering wherever he finds it, out of sincere compassion for the afflicted.



But we human beings have multiple motivations for the very same action. Why should it be any different for the Holy Spirit? Jesus’ miracles reveal not only his compassion, but his hidden identity. You and I may meet a deaf mute and feel sorry about his suffering. But the power to bestow speech and hearing is a bit beyond us. But it is not beyond Jesus. The Holy Spirit who inspired the words of the Old Testament led the Son of God to this particular man in part because his healing would fulfill the words of Isaiah, that God himself would come to save his people, opening the ears of the deaf and causing

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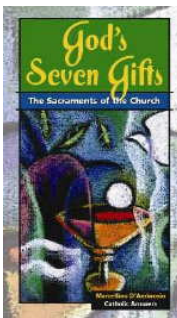
the mute to speak. Jesus' miracles are "signs" as they are called in John's Gospel, pointing beyond themselves to the bigger picture, the plan of salvation stretching from Genesis to Revelation and to the Savior who is the focal point of the entire story.

There is something else in the story that it would be easy to miss. Jesus begins his journey in the region of Sidon and comes to the Decapolis, on the eastern shore of the Jordan, where he meets the deaf-mute. These regions have something in common: they are both pagan territories. Yes, Jesus comes first and foremost for the lost children of Israel. But his compassion knows no bounds. His miraculous love transforms the lives of outcasts as well as the pious—tax collectors, Samaritans, gentiles, even the hated Romans!



So James calls us to do no more than follow the example of Jesus. The prejudice which causes us to give preferential treatment to the beautiful people, those who are popular, wealthy, good-looking and "nice," may seem to come "naturally" to us who are wounded by original sin. But it needs to be renounced by those who have accepted the healing gift of grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the body of Christ, if there is any preferential treatment to be given, it is to those in greatest need, even if they happen to speak another language and come from a different country. In fact, the unity and brotherhood of different ethnic groups, personality types, and socioeconomic groups in one community is a sign that this is no man-made sect, depending on merely human forces to hold it together. No, this is a community whose unity is due to divine power, the power of the Spirit. And it is no spiritual club for those who look alike and dress alike. It is instead comprised by people from every tribe, tongue, people, language, occupation, and lifestyle. It is the universal family of God, the Church Catholic.

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## **God's Seven Gifts: The Sacraments of the Catholic Church**

In the Gospels, Christ made it clear just how important the sacraments are for our lives. Yet today, many Catholics take them for granted. With little understanding of the importance and power of the sacraments, these Catholics are simply going through the motions. But as Marcellino D'Ambrosio explains in God's Seven Gifts, God gave us the sacraments as a gift to help us in our walk with him.