

September, 1971

In a silent ceremony,
deaf parishioners "hear"
God's message and answer
in a language of
their own

SIGNS OF FAITH



Rev. Hodgson gives sign-language sermon and speaks simultaneously for lip-readers.



Pointing to the palm, signifying crucifixion, is sign for the name of "Jesus."

Not a sound can be heard by most of the congregation, but that doesn't stop them from worshiping in a full church service, hymns included. It happens each Sunday at the St. Matthew Lutheran Church for the Deaf, in Queens, New York, where the regular mass is conducted in sign language.



Learning their language, these worshipers "speak" of heaven.

Signs of Faith

Rev. Daniel Hodgson, who is not deaf himself but who has been trained to minister to the non-speaking and deaf, leads the service in both sign and speech as the parishioners watch and lip-read. Their responses are expressed through heart and hand, with signs that carry a beauty and power all their own. This is a vocabulary that includes all, from a symbolic gesture for "love" to a most graphic depiction of Jesus. Here, communicating with God allows no language barrier.



As words appear on screen, silent choir leads "hand-singing" of traditional hymns.



Flanked by pastors, members "sign" Saint—Matthew—Lutheran—Church—for—the—Deaf.



Choir's "My Redeemer Liveth" proves religious expression need not be vocal.

Signs of Faith



Right hand opened over left is sign language for "church."



Hands drawing inward illustrates "thank-you" to God.



"Love"-sign's hands are two people bound over the heart.

Visual aids help teach deaf children in Sunday-school program.



Signs of Faith

At St. Matthew's, music is as essential as it is in any church service. The 12-member choir, all deaf, "sing" hymns with their hands while the words are projected for the congregation. A piano provides beat and tempo for Rev. Hodgson and other hearing participants, who translate the feeling of the songs to the deaf in the pace of their signs and the stress of their words. "The flow of movement, the musical sense, is kept up through the hands," he says, "so each song 'sounds' different. The deaf can pick up some vibrations from the piano, depending on their amount of hearing loss, though an organ would be much better for this. The important thing is, even silent praise in honor of God is heard loudly in heaven."

Coronet