

## Homily Notes for Sunday, September 9, 2018, 23<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary B

Readings: Isaiah 35: 4-7a; Jas 2: 1-5; Mk 7: 31-37

**Jesus directs us how to be his disciples, with special care for the poor and the hopeless, treating all impartially, caring for the whole People of God.**

- 1. Commentary on the Readings:** After conflict with the Jewish authorities, Jesus goes into Gentile territory to the north and in the region of Galilee. His miracles demonstrate that he is, indeed, the Messiah that Isaiah was prophesying. He also goes there to teach his disciples. The central theme today is an invitation to become humble instruments of healing in Jesus' hands by giving voice to the voiceless, the needy, and the marginalized in our society.
- 2. The first reading** reminds us that God is concerned to give hope for the return of his people since they are in Exile. He promises to heal, to restore and to provide a way to return to the homeland. On this return, God especially cares for the most helpless, those who have the least possibility of returning "home": "*the frightened, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the mute.*"
- 3. Today's psalm** sings of a God who cares for the most vulnerable, especially widows and orphans. He gives sight to the blind, raises up those who are bowed down and welcomes strangers.
- 4. This is why, in today's second reading,** James gives us some basic and challenging principles of life together as Christians. He exhorts Christians to show no **partiality** based on external appearance or riches and to practice God's "preferential option for the poor." He warns the faithful against scorning or shaming the poor while showing special consideration to the rich. Not to show "partiality" is the key guideline.

**What is partiality?** Partiality is "the state or quality of favoring one person, faction more than another; biased; prejudiced. Partiality would occur when the referee in a football game favored one team over another because his brother was the coach. Partiality occurs if Black users of drugs were given prison terms and white users of the same drugs under the same terms were given suspended sentences. We also call this immoral discrimination. Partiality would occur if we gave a lot of attention to one student because either he or his parents were rich or powerful and ignored another simply because they were poorer or less well dressed. Partiality might occur in blended families when a child which belongs to one of the parents is not treated rightly by the other.

- 5. To be impartial does not mean not to judge others; it means to judge fairly and equitably.** In today's church it is fashionable to say that we should never judge one another. Jesus makes clear that we are to judge, but not hypocritically in Matthew 7:1-5. St. Paul makes it clear that we must judge others if we are to correct them (1 Cor 5:1-13), Jesus makes it clear that we must judge if and when anyone has anything against us or the community and they need to be corrected (Matt 18:15-20). Such judgement should have as its goal correction and restoration of the offender.
- 6. To be "a government of laws and not of men"** is a corrective to partiality if everyone is treated equally under the law. Are we always fair to each other in our fellowship or are we guilty of partiality? To avoid "partiality" we should live by objective principles or guidelines. To live in this way is also helpful to avoid mistreating people when we become angry or emotional. A truly professional person can keep control of himself and treat others "right" all the time. This is part of what has made our country great.
- 7. Today's gospel** describes how Jesus fulfills Isaiah's Messianic prophecy, "*The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*" It is to be understood both literally and spiritually. In the miracle of the deaf and dumb man we can see a symbol of the way God acts on souls. For us to believe, God must first open our heart so we can listen to his Word. Then, like the Apostles, we too can proclaim the mighty works of God.
- 9. The Church has always held that there are three levels of interpretation of Scripture beyond the literal (CCC 115-119).**

1. There is the **allegorical** sense. It develops our faith showing the significance of the events in Christ.
2. There is the **moral** sense. It shows us how to act justly.
3. There is the **anagogical** sense. It leads us to understand terms in their eternal sense, leading us to heaven.

**10. What might be the spiritual levels of meaning to our readings? Spiritually, the ailments listed by Isaiah are symbolic of our interior illnesses:** blindness to the needs of our neighbor, unwillingness to hear God's voice, the inability to speak words of praise and gratitude. The Gospels remind us that no one can be a follower of the Lord without reaching out to the helpless ("preferential option for the poor" CCC 2443-2449).

**11. Let us apply the spiritual levels of interpretation to this issue.**

1. **Literally**, we can see that Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' actions would **direct our faith** to help the needy and powerless, hence our St Vincent de Paul Society plus our own actions.
2. **Its significance in Christ.** We can see a symbol of the way God acts on souls: for us to believe, God must first open our hearts to be able to listen to his word. Then he frees us to share and to explain to others the meaning of things.
3. **Its moral sense.** We must act to protect the innocent and vulnerable. Salvation is not just a result of an intellectual assertion. These passages show we must actually care for such people in order to be saved. Which passage in Matthew most clearly shows this? See Matt 25:31-46. Here no mention is made of faith. Here to be counted among the sheep we must have fed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothe the naked and visit those in prison!
4. **For our salvation** if we don't do these things we could be condemned by God and lose heaven.

**12. Further application of the Gospel. The power of the tongue (of speech) is very great.** This healing was seen to demonstrate the power of the tongue. If we are living in Christ, the control of our speech is one of the first signs of the presence of God (See James 3:1-11).

**The Venerable Bede** says, "Or, he is deaf and dumb who has neither ears for the Word of God, nor opens his mouth to speak it. It is necessary that those who have now learned both to hear and to speak the words of God, should offer such as these to the Lord, that He may heal them." **St Anthony of the Desert** says when he quotes Solomon, "Let us enter by the narrow gate... What is this narrow gate? Solomon makes (this) clear to us where he says: 'Let not your utterances make you guilty, and say not before his representative, 'It was a mistake,' lest God be angered by such words and destroy the works of your hands. Rather, fear God!'" (Eccles 5:5)

**In Romans 1:29-30** both gossip and scandalmongering are listed among the sins that deserve death. In fact, in the list of 65 "Serious Sins" in St. Paul, at least 14 involve sins of the tongue. Only eight involve sexual behavior.

**13. Application:** How many of the ills of the earth are due largely to the spiritual deafness of those who cannot hear the cries of the poor and the oppressed. They are too deaf to catch the sobs of grief. They are too hard of hearing to catch the rumble of discontent over injustice. How many of the ills of a political system are caused by partiality, crony capitalism, unfair implementation of laws and regulations. Let us be aware if this should inform our voting in the midterm elections. This cure of an impediment of speech is equally suggestive for the spiritual life. One reason why our civilization has so little to say of profound significance is because so many of Christ's disciples have an impediment in their speech. They choose to be "God's mutes." To the ringing appeal of the Psalmist (Ps. 107:2), "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so," they reply, "Kindly excuse me, I do not want to go on record." Might we or our church suffer from the impediment of selfish preoccupation, or of caution, prudence, and cowardice?