

## **September 5, 2021**

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

James tells us in the second reading: *My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.* He tells us to not show partiality - not towards others and also not partiality towards the faith of Jesus Christ. But it is easy for us to be partial. It is easy to find reasons to treat one person differently than another, easy to show partiality to the teaching of Jesus - to take one and not another. So let's look at this problem of partiality and why James steers us away from it.

He starts by talking about the favor and attention we show to the wealthy and famous. Although Jesus tells us not to store up for ourselves wealth, although he cautions us against being too highly esteemed in the eyes of people, we are drawn in by these trappings. Jesus tells us to store up treasure in heaven, to seek the Lord and his righteousness above all else - and certainly to seek God's favor above the fleeting fame that this world can bestow on certain people. Maybe we show these people better treatment and attention because we expect something back from them? Or are we just somehow in awe of them? On the flip side do we ignore other people because we think they are less worthy, or because they can't give us something, or because they don't make us feel special when we are around them. Other people may make us feel like we did something wrong when we reach out to a lowly or strange, or unpopular person - and then pat us on the back for snapping a selfie with a famous person.

I remember a story of a young man who was about to be introduced to the President. Right before the meeting he passed a kitchen worker carrying a tray and said "hey, how's it going"? Immediately the President walked up. He turned to him and said "hey, how's it going"? He was looked at a bit strangely. After the President left he was pulled aside by someone who witnessed the whole thing. This man said to him: "I am a little shocked." The young man asked "why." The older person said "you treated the President like he was a kitchen worker." The young man looked back and said "I prefer to think that I treated the kitchen worker the same way I would the president." Partiality is not looking first to who a person is - their status, or whether they are one of "us" or "them" - and treating all people with dignity, openness, and respect.

Jesus was a person who surely didn't show partiality. The man in the Gospel whom Jesus healed was from the Decapolis. This was an area of 10 cities founded by Alexander the Great to

spread Greek culture. It was a predominantly pagan area. This man was likely a pagan citizen. The people bring him to Jesus (probably more because they had heard of the “miracle worker” and thought it would make a great show than they actually cared about the man). The healing of such an impossible case would be great entertainment, and would make Jesus look good. However, notice that he pulls him aside to do the healing privately - this is not about Jesus’ notoriety, it is a personal act of mercy and a special encounter between Jesus and the man. He healed him as he would any Jewish person in the temple. Jesus treated the wealthy with the same level of concern as the fisherman, he spoke to the Roman Governor Pilate the same way as he did the woman at the well. Jesus is the model of impartiality.

We can all grow in being able to be impartial to those that we don’t understand, or who we disagree with, or who have hurt us - to learn to be more Christlike and loving and generous to those from the other “tribe.” But, we need not only to be impartial to others, but also impartial to Jesus. We can’t take Him when we want and ignore Him when we don’t like what He says. Can’t only hear when he is like he rich person showering gifts, but ignore him when He makes demands on us or His words are uncomfortable to us. The touch of Jesus brings openness - like it did to the deaf and mute man - and this touch is a challenging and personal touch. Like medicine on a wound, the treatments of the Divine physician can sting at times. The healing He brings to us is a healing of a spiritual deafness to his Word, it is the healing of a spiritual paralysis that stops us from proclaiming the reality of his presence as the prophesied saving presence of God. The first reading today reads like a recap of all of Jesus’ healing miracles. He is the one the prophecy speaks of. He is the one of whom the Isaiah says: *Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God ... he comes to save you.*

When we can be impartial to Jesus in all his manifestations, then we can be able to be impartial to all the various manifestations of the people around us. When we open our ears to Jesus and absorb His words, then we can also open our ears to the cries of those around us in need - and listen with love to those who differ from us. When our mouths are truly open we can thank Jesus for the times He lavished gifts on us, and also thank Him for the times when, in love, he refused. Then with our mouths open to proclaim Jesus, we can repeat His words impartially to others regardless of who they are. By this, we help to usher his presence into the lives of other people who need Jesus, we then draw them to feel his healing touch in the sacraments. Joining impartially to Jesus we call out to others saying: *Ephphetha* - let us be open to Jesus together!