

All of today's readings are Golden in that they are dense, very heavy, and full of value to us in our journey of faith.

Prophesy of Isaiah

Two old buddies were reflecting on life and started talking about baseball. Finally they were discussing whether or not baseball was played in heaven. After a while they came to an agreement. Whoever died first would come back and tell the other if they played baseball in heaven. Eventually one of the men died. About two weeks later as the other fellow was in bed for the night, his friend came to see him. He asked him, "Hey old buddy is there baseball in heaven?" He answered, "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that there is baseball in heaven. The bad news is you're pitching tomorrow."

Isaiah's prophecies may not have given us award winning pulpit human such as that I just brilliantly delivered to you BUT prophecy he most certainly did. And thus, we begin our readings with the Prophet Isaiah. Did you know that Isaiah holds prominence in all three major religions? Fun Fact. □ In our reading you can find great comfort in the Prophet's words during times of trouble and turmoil, but it is the end of these proclamations that give us the feel that Isaiah was not writing about what will come with Christ but reads as if he was there and is recounting facts of events that have already unfolded! I find his word, in relationship to today's Gospel reading, truly amazing!

Letter of St. James

Then we pivot to St. James and his call for unity and impartiality. If only the Church could lead the world in this call, oh what a paradise we could build together. A reminder to us all that EACH of us is God's most perfect and precious creation and we, all of you, are duly warned never to put one above the other. Now, we know that our limited human comprehension, ego, heart, and even our biases get in the way of this all the time. The key to avoid the sin of partiality, or prejudice, is to keep your mind open to God. Keep a watchful eye with Christ and turn away, repent, from thoughts and actions that manifest themselves as such. We will fail at this, but the test is not in falling short but rather in realizing it and turning away from it. For when we do fail we turn from God and when we correct a transgression such as this, we turn away from said sin and turn back towards God.

All for the Glory of God

So, let us now turn to God Himself as He travels through this pagan region in today's reading and learn directly from Him, from Jesus, what is expected of us in context with these other readings of scripture.

First, it is said that the crowd Jesus was with, that Mark is recounting, was in fact Jewish, but the clear majority of people that Jesus would encounter in Decapolis (dih-KAP-uh-lis) would be gentile, meaning they were pagans. Jesus did not put any one group aside from His love, nor His teaching, based on their current belief. He was interested in their hearts and opening them up to the Word, to the love of God. He most certainly, "...showed no partiality...[and did] adhere to the faith." Jesus never favored the rich, the educated, men only, nor the well placed in society. Quite the opposite was the case. He consistently reached out to the lesser in society, to the poor, the un-favored, the un-liked, the un-trusted, the hated, and the marginalized. I am so confounded with good men and women of faith who fall into the devil's snare, at times, and hold such negative feelings of mistrust and fear towards their fellow man at times. I can only imagine that it breaks Jesus' heart when this happens, when we turn AWAY from Him and towards the wrong path that only leads to darkness and despair.

As so often is the case now in Jesus' travels, people of need are presented to Him and this visit to Decapolis (dih-KAP-uh-lis) is no different. But pay close attention to what Jesus did before He aided the deaf man with the speech impediment. Jesus removed him to a private place and then healed him. Through His actions, Jesus is teaching us to perform our faith discreetly and not to use our good deeds to enhance our own image and lot. Now, Mark gives us an amazingly detailed account on how this healing happens including a unique and intimate moment that Biblical translators left alone...Jesus speaking in His own tongue, "Ephphathal" (EF-fah-thah) meaning 'be open.' We have this rich account of physical interaction and words that have such importance in their recounting that it lives today as a rite in the Sacrament of Baptism where the priest or bishop touches the ears and the mouth of the child with their thumb and says, "The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May He soon touch your ears to receive His Word, and your mouth to proclaim His faith, to the praise and glory."

Those Jewish witnesses would clearly observe this miracle and connect it back to Isaiah, and why not? Isaiah got it right as if it was a retelling of the event and not a prophesy of it. The crowd's exclamation of, "He has done all things well," further connects back to creation itself and how God made the heavens and the earth and all things on it and declared 'it is good.' Jesus is being recognized here as something more than man, something divine, as God.

Finally, I find the hidden message here to be very exciting as it is a commandment that reaches out across the ages to us right here today. Jesus' healing miracle goes beyond the one person and reflects upon all of humanity. He is in pagan land and those there do not know the Word as they do not hear the Word. As such they are dumb to the Word, to

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----Father Mike Cadotte----

God, and to their own salvation. Jesus has come to perfect the Word and to open their ears and give them knowledge to profess on their tongues to the rest of the world. That is the call, that is the challenge. Do not discriminate against those that are not of the faith. Do not discriminate against those that you view as somehow less or unequal, but rather live out the Word to all. In other words, do not just use words to speak of Jesus but follow Christ through your actions as well. We hear in the Bible time and time again that faith without action is no faith at all. Get out there friends and LIVE the faith to ALL.

Praise the Lord, my soul! God secures justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry – Praise the Lord, my soul! God gives sight and opens minds and raises up those who were bowed down – Praise the Lord, my soul! God loves the just and protects (protects) the stranger – Praise the Lord, my soul!

Ephphathal (EF-fah-thah)! BE OPEN! Be open friends in your heart and in your actions to God's call to love and be in union with each other. Not some. But all.

AMEN