

2021 September 05

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading:

First: Isaiah 35.4-7, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.” (4b)

The Psalm: 146, “The Lord loves the righteous and watches over the strangers.” (8b)

Second: James 2.1-5, “Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith?” (5)

The Gospel: Mark 7.31-37, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” (37b)

Border without barriers

We need at some juncture in life someone to speak to us as Prophet Isaiah, “Be strong, do not fear.” Why or how does it come? Look, your God is near to you, in front of you, behind you and above you. He is your guardian! Isn’t it wonderful? Isaiah is prophesying the multiple effects that happen when God’s care is on his people. His words of comfort were aimed at the exiled and conquered people of Israel, who earned their exile because of their apostasy, abandoning of their God. The same words of comfort from God come to each of us whenever and wherever we are, and in whatever condition we are in, whether sinful or virtuous!

During the period of exile God did hide his presence for a while from them, his face of mercy and love. That was to make them reflect on the past mercies of God and to repent from their present sin of going after alien gods. Through Isaiah God reminds them, his people, his covenant with their ancestors and renews it by offering to rescue them. From their later history we know that God did rescue them from exile and brought them back to their land. Jesus in the gospel works out one such caring act of God.

James explains to us how we are supposed to behave as disciples and followers of Jesus, and as children of God to take and extend God’s continuous care to the people. All these are food for thought and action for us, first by experiencing such saving acts of God in our lives, and then becoming dispensers of such salvation to the world by partnering with God in his redemptive act. People wanted Jesus to lay his hands on the sick. Anyone to whom Jesus did this was healed immediately. In today’s healing Jesus proves that he is the key to all the doors that are shut. He puts his finger into the deaf man’s ears and touches with his spittle the man’s tongue, which was mute till that time, and opens both his ears and tongue enabling him to hear and to speak. Probably this man was a Gentile and an untouchable for the Jews. By healing him Jesus proves that God is of all peoples and his presence and care is available always to all. He also shattered the barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles.

For God no one is untouchable. With God there is no partiality. Maybe, there is favoritism with God toward the weak, poor, oppressed, abandoned, forsaken, the orphans, widows, the social outcasts, etc. James in his writing today exhorts or even warns us against all kinds of discrimination, and against humans showing favoritism toward the rich and famous, the powerful and wealthy. He advises us to side with whom is God’s favour. Jesus tells to each of us, “*Eph’pha.tha*, Be opened!” Be open to all the above to whom God shows his favoritism that we may find a place in God’s kingdom promised by Jesus along with them!

Fr. George