

Twenty Third Sunday of the year – September 06, 2015

Readings: Isaiah 35:4-7; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37

One of God's attributes is to liberate people, freeing them from all the fetters that bind them and bonds that hold them away from the divine. The Book of Genesis tells us that God created everything that was good and placed the creation at the service of man. He gave the freedom to man so that he could make use of all created things and serve him the Lord and creator. He manifested his love to us by offering us a total liberation, which we need to accept with gratitude and a simple heart. He wanted us to manifest this love towards others. He gave us his Son in Jesus as his gift to us and who in turn taught us that only through love can we manifest our presence towards others. He came to save us all. He showed his special care towards the poor and the sick and healed them. In today's Gospel Jesus heals a man who was deaf and was suffering from speech impediment. Jesus touched him and healed him after which he could hear clearly and speak the good news of the Kingdom to all. This was the pagan territory and people showed great admiration towards him. In the first reading we have the Prophet who is a chosen servant of God reflecting on his mission. Nothing could break his trust and confidence in God. He knows that God is coming. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and ears of the deaf will be unsealed. In the second reading we hear that faith without work is dead. Living faith will perform works of charity. James tells us that God has chosen the poor of the world to inherit the Kingdom.

The First Reading of today from the Book of Isaiah is a consolation passage. The oracles of prophet Isaiah bring the message of hope for the people of Israel. If they would accept the challenge to return to the Lord they were certain to enjoy advantages only the court of heaven could grant them. He called on the people to have right relationship with God. Isaiah wanted the people to know that it is God who takes the initiative of approaching them. If they turned to God and remained faithful to him they were certain to discover remarkable gifts that divine providence placed in their lives. The way out of the fear that had dominated their lives in the past is faith in God. As long as their kings looked for security in the resources of this world, they would never break out of this circle of fear. Prophet Isaiah was never tired of telling them that God alone can give them true and lasting security. They were once unable to see by the eyes of faith, but now their eyes will be opened to see God. They were unable to hear the word of God, but their ears will be opened. Once unable to make any progress along the path of faith, they will be able to cover distances without effort. They will be able to sing songs of praise to God. This transformation in their character will be matched by a transformation in the world around them. A lifeless desert, representing an unbelieving world will be changed into a garden filled with springs and streams of living water.

In the second reading of today James teaches us not to show favors to anyone. To value people for their riches, wealth or power is fairly common. It even infects Christians at times. It shows a lack of genuine faith. James offers a healthy corrective to the Christians. He tells them that they are not to judge with evil thoughts by elevating a person in fine clothes over and above a poor person in dirty clothes. This is because God does not show partiality to anyone. For the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. That is why God has chosen the poor in the world to be

rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him. There is no partiality on the part of God. James in this passage provides a solid basis for the preferential option for the poor. It also shows that the poor are more often open to God. They are often rich in faith and look forward to the kingdom of heaven. As a general rule, the worldly mind of the rich man is preoccupied with making money, investment, cutting corners to save, paying low wages to increase profits, giving to charities in return for public recognition, etc. All these things oppose the spiritual ways of God. In truth, his spirituality is dead. He does not have the spirit of poverty.

With today's Gospel reading we enter into a central part of Mark's Gospel. Jesus continues his preaching. He passes through the region of the Decapolis and comes to a hill located northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The setting for the story is rather complicated description of a journey that includes Tyre, Sidon, the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Decapolis. It is indeed a complicated geography but for Mark it is not the place or region that is important but the theology contained in the passage. His purpose is to place Jesus in the gentile territory since this is the place where the message is received most openly and with great sincerity. The section begins with Jesus healing a man who is both deaf and suffering from speech impediment and they besought him to lay his hand upon him and end with the elaborate praise of Jesus. These are not just miracle stories about Jesus' power but have a teaching purpose. Jesus was now in basically a Gentile, a non-Jewish area. There a man is brought to Jesus to be healed. He was deaf, that is, he could not hear and he had an impediment in his speech, that is, he could not speak properly. It does not say he was having this deformity from birth. In his process of healing Jesus uses certain actions which are not a normal part of his healing, which is almost like a ritual. Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ear and puts spittle or saliva that is said to have medical power, on his tongue. At the same time Jesus looked up towards heaven, to his Father in a prayer and said, in Aramaic, Ephphatha meaning be opened. Immediately the man was healed: he could hear and speak perfectly. The people around were astounded and they praise God. They cried out and said that he has done all things well; he has made the deaf hear and the dumb speak.

Any person unable to hear and to speak coherently is almost condemned to isolation in a culture where hearing and speaking are the primary tools of communication. On a deeper level Jesus himself emphasized the need for authentic hearing as the required response to his preaching and teaching. Through this healing miracle Jesus granted this person the ability to hear authentically. These actions of Jesus were similar to what one would find in common Greco-Roman healing stories. The healing process Jesus uses is almost like a ritual and, in fact, it was. Jesus touches the sick person who was brought to him to be healed. Taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. The person received his full healing. Nevertheless Mark does not portray Jesus as simply one more Hellenistic divine man. Jesus mediates the power of God and therefore the healing fingers of Jesus are in fact the finger of God famous for performing the exodus miracles. Here the way Jesus heals the man reminds us of the Sacrament of Baptism where the ears of the person to be baptized are opened to hear the Word of God and the tongues are loosened to speak about Christ to others. In the Gospel passage to hear the Word of God means to carry it out in real life. Although Jesus tried to restrain the man in today's Gospel, the cured man and all those around proclaimed what had taken place to every place they were able to go. Really this person who

was healed felt a compulsion from within him to do the proclamation. He and his companions felt the need to share with others what they had heard and experienced.

Unlike many other miracle stories in the Gospels, this one pays particular attention to the miracle itself showing how it was done and boldly proclaiming its success. This miracle shows how Jesus fulfills the words of prophesy of Isaiah which ultimately is the promise of salvation. This miracle portrays Jesus as bringing about the eschatological salvation. Still, Jesus orders all who witnessed this to remain quiet and to tell no one. This in fact part of Mark's theme of Messianic Secret. Jesus cannot be fully understood until he undergoes his death and resurrection. Declaring Jesus as a miracle worker falls short of capturing the divine mission he has undertaken. However, even Jesus cannot prohibit the good news from being proclaimed. He has acted in the place of God, renewing the fallen creation and making the promise of eschatological salvation a present reality. Mark tells us that immediately the man was healed: he could hear and speak perfectly. The people around were astounded. They cried out almost in one voice saying that he has done all things well for he has made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. The future promised by the prophet has now arrived in the presence of Jesus.

In the Gospel, really to hear the Word of God is to carry it out. The word hearing implies, listening, understanding, making the message one's own and living it out in word and action. Although Jesus tried to restrain the man in today's Gospel, the cured man and all those around proclaimed what had happened to the deaf and dumb man everywhere they went. Really the man just had to do it. After all, he was now hearing and he was now able to share with others what he had heard and experienced. If we were really excited about the Good News of Jesus Christ, if we were really excited about the experience of having the Christian vision of life, we would have to do exactly the same. So, let us pray today for the gift of hearing, to hear the voice of God calling to us in everything that will happen this day. Let us pray for the gift of speech, that is, to be so filled with the liberating experience of knowing Jesus that we simply cannot refrain from sharing that experience with all those around us. At the same time let us reflect on what Jesus has done for us. Let us reflect on the words of the crowd when they said, "He has done everything well." And may the grace of God always be with us so we will never forget the abundance of treasures that we have received through Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit."

The deaf and dumb person in the Gospel was given the ability to hear the words of Jesus for himself and respond. He did not seek Jesus but Jesus sought him out and touched him because of a few of his friends. Once healed, he was told not to tell anyone. This was not out of mere humility but because he wanted people to follow him not for being a miracle worker but as the messiah. But the people were not yet ready to accept him as the messiah. Again he was in a pagan territory and the messiah could not be proclaimed there. It was also the moment of faith for the disciples and it was a call for them to believe in him. Generally in our life we do not always find God where we expect. Frequently God is not in those people or circumstances we find so fine and attractive and not necessarily where we think God should be. God comes to us in the common and the ordinary events. We need to open our eyes and listen attentively to find him. That is why the India Poet Tagore says, leave this chanting and telling of beads and find God where the tiller ploughs the field or the stone cutter cuts the stone. God is found only if we look for him with sincere heart. So, let us pray today for the gift of hearing, to hear the voice of God calling to us in everything that will happen this day.

So, let us pray today for the gift of hearing, to hear the voice of God calling to us in everything that will happen this day. Let us pray for the gift of speech, that is, to be so filled with the liberating experience of knowing Jesus that we simply cannot refrain from sharing that experience with all those around us. He is the one who can touch us and heal us and make us his true followers. Let us also pray for the gift of speech, that is, to be so filled with the liberating experience of knowing Jesus that we simply cannot refrain from sharing that experience with all those around us. At the same time let us reflect on what Jesus has done for us in our life. Let us reflect on the words of the crowd when they said, "He has done everything well." If the grace of God always be with us we will never forget the abundance of treasures that we have received through Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit.

In order to be healed, it is not enough to enter into bodily contact with Jesus: it is also necessary for the power of God that is in Jesus to manifest itself and to really be exerted. This power of God is manifested and exerted to us by faith. Here Jesus healed a sick person, he did not do so as a man, but rather as God, who is the incarnate Son of God. Here only faith allows us to think supernaturally and to say with certainty that this man, Jesus, who is similar to all other men on the outside, is not only man but also God. Therefore it is truly the faith of the sick person, as well as the faith of those who accompany him and who bring him to Jesus, that allows the omnipotence of God to manifest itself and to be exerted. So let us also receive, with faith, Jesus in his Eucharist. If we believe that Christ comes into us to heal our body and our soul, and then there is no doubt that he will do so according to the measure of our faith. Let us ask Mary to help us to believe as she has always believed in God. We ask our Blessed Mother to prepare our heart fully to receive her son in this most great sacrament, mystery of faith and love.

One day, as usually, an orphan, a little girl, stood at the street corner begging for food, money or whatever she could get. Now, this girl was wearing very tattered clothes, was dirty and quite disheveled. A well-to-do young man passed that corner without giving the girl a second look. But, when he returned to his expensive home, his happy and comfortable family, and his well-laden dinner table, his thoughts returned to the young orphan. He became very angry with God for allowing such conditions to exist. He reproached God, saying, how you can let this happen. Why don't you do something to help this girl. Then he heard God in the depths of his being responding by saying I did. I created you.

There was a blind girl who hated herself just because she was blind. She hated everyone, except her loving boyfriend. He was always there for her. She said that if she could only see the world, she would marry her boyfriend. One day, someone donated a pair of eyes to her and then she could see everything, including her boyfriend. Her boyfriend asked her, "now that you can see the world, will you marry me?" The girl was shocked when she saw that her boyfriend was blind too, and refused to marry him. Her boyfriend walked away in tears, and later wrote a letter to her saying: "Just take care of my eyes dear."

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