

## **HOMILY for 23<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B**

This Sunday's Gospel tells us the story of a deaf man with a speech impediment whom Jesus healed & restored to normalcy. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

An elderly gentleman had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He finally decided to see Dr. Ellenberg, who had him fitted for a set of hearing aids. The elderly gentleman went back in a month to the doctor. Dr. Ellenberg checked his hearing, and after the exam was complete said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be so please that you can hear again."

"Oh, I haven't told my family yet," the gentleman replied. "I just sit around & listen to their conversations. I changed my will three times last month!"

Anyway, one of the activities Jesus had done a lot during His years of ministry was to heal the sick & the suffering. This Sunday's Gospel is a great example of it as we see Jesus healed a deaf man with a speech impediment. Here is how this healing story was reported: "...People brought to Him [Jesus] a deaf man who had a speech impediment & begged Him to lay His hand on him. Jesus took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put His finger into the man's ears &, spitting, touched his tongue; then He looked up to Heaven & groaned, & said to him, 'Ephphatha!' – that is, 'Be opened!' - & immediately the man's ears were opened; his speech impediment was removed; & he spoke plainly." It continued, "...They [the people] were exceedingly astonished & they said, 'He has done all things well. He makes the dead hear & the mute speak.'" My friends, wasn't it a wonderful miracle? Can you imagine how that poor man would have felt after experiencing the incredible healing power of Jesus?

We can only imagine how long the deaf man with a speech impediment has suffered from those problems. They not only reduced the quality of life but also caused their victim to live in isolation & loneliness. If we have a sore throat & cannot talk, it would drive us crazy. Or, if we have a hearing problem like some senior couples often do, it would cause us communication trouble & frustrate us. So, Jesus not only restored that poor man to his normal life but also reconnected him to his family & community. It's not by accident that Jesus had done all sorts of healing for the people of God back then. For He knew all the health & emotional problems that we humans have suffered in our daily life. After all, that is why Jesus came down to earth to suffer with us & empathize with our daily troubles.

That is why, in my humble opinion, it is very important for the Church to keep up with this important mission of Jesus & make healing a top priority on its agenda. If the Church wants to stay true to the mission of its founder & be relevant to the needs of the modern world, it needs to do more healing work & calls on its members to bring healing to the world every chance possible. Besides, there have been so much more pain & suffering in our world now compared to Jesus' time as we have seen a lot more tragedies & senseless violence every day. Imagine what kind of world we would build up & transform this current world of ours into if everyone would commit oneself to bring healing instead of causing pain & problems to others.

However, an old, painful wound that has torn the human family apart is reminded in this Sunday's Second Reading, namely, the injustice & terrible treatment of the poor in the world. Here is how St. James described that wound to us in today's Second Reading: "...Suppose there should come into your assembly a man fashionably dressed, with gold rings on his fingers; & at the same time a poor man dressed in shabby clothes. Suppose further you were to take notice

of the well-dressed man & say, 'Sit right here, please;' whereas you were to say to the poor man, 'You can stand!' or, 'Sit over there by my footrest.' Have you not in a case like this discriminated in your hearts? Have you not set yourselves up as judges who hand down corrupt decisions?" My friends, bias & discrimination has caused so much pain in our society & hurt our human relationships in all sorts of ways. It has stirred up one fight after another & left lingering resentment in our human psyche. St. James believed that we need to ask the Lord to heal us from this terrible wound & help us get rid of that bias. Otherwise, it will generate all kinds of painful infections in our life & destroy our human community.

As we all know, the people of God were driven into slavery & had suffered tremendously. They were hurt physically, mentally, & spiritually. They lost their homes, possessions, & country. Worst yet, they lost hope & belief in their God. In today's First Reading, prophet Isaiah wanted the Lord & every human being to do the following for the people of God: "Say to those whose hearts were frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense, he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing." Clearly Isaiah wanted the Lord & everyone to give the people of God reassurance & lift up their broken spirit. He would like the Lord to bring hope & healing to these shattered lives. Similarly, our current world need the Lord & everyone to give it hope & reassurance. For we often hear negative criticisms a lot these days. People tend to put down one another & stir up controversies to create divisions in our community. In contrast, Isaiah would want us to lift up the weak & bring healing to our broken world.

My dear brothers & sisters, it's always easy to demonize people whom we do not like & tear apart people with viewpoints different from ours. That is what our current world has promoted every day & would want us to do. However, Jesus would like us to do the opposite & bring healing & hope to our broken world. He wants us to imagine a world where all the wounds are healed & hope is restored. Perhaps, that is what Heaven might look like.