

REFLECTION FOR 23RD SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YR B

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

Today's readings offer us **two challenges**: 1) We are to become humble instruments of healing in Jesus' hands by giving voice to the voiceless and caring love to the needy and the marginalized in our society. 2) We are to open our ears to hear the word of God, open our eyes to see God's presence in everyone, and to convey the Good News of God's love and salvation to others.

In the first reading (Is 35:4-7), the prophet Isiah reminds us that God's eyes are constantly focused on the helpless and the poor.

In today's **second reading**, the apostle James encourages us to practice God's "preferential option" for the poor and to show no partiality based on external appearance.

His words equally apply to all types of prejudices in our families, churches and society. So, to favour some people and disregard others based on their race, economic, social or religious background is a terrible evil against God and humanity.

The message of James is still very relevant to all of us today. This is because today, in our families, communities, churches, and indeed all over the world, people still suffer terrible injustice because of who they are. People still suffer because of where they come from and the colour of their skin.

We need to break the social, economic, political and religious barriers that confront us. Many innocent, poor and good people are not valued because of their economic, social, political, religious and cultural status.

The root cause of all these evil is pride and selfishness. Pride makes one think he/she is better than the other or, that he/she is superior while others are inferior. So, they should be treated differently. Selfishness makes one think only about one's wellbeing and so, ignores the sufferings and needs of others.

Let us learn to be open to helping others and be open to the goodness of others.

The Gospel reading begins with some people bringing a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech to Jesus and begging Jesus to lay his hand on him. The action of the unnamed people is an indication of goodwill and. This man is not making his journey towards healing or towards faith alone or in isolation and neither can we.

Here was a man who was saved by the faith of his friends. Had it not been for them he may never have reached the healing presence of Jesus at all.

There are those who are daily saved by the faith of those who love them. Many of us would gladly witness that we owe all that we are and ever will be, to the faith of our godly parents, grandparents, wife or husband, siblings or good friends.

Openness to leave the crowd. Responding to the people's request, our Lord Jesus Christ takes the man away from the crowd and healed him.

There is the need for us to be open to allow the Lord to take us away from the noisy crowd of our world so that God may heal our blindness to the needs of the poor, the lonely, the broken-hearted, our unwillingness to hear God's voice and our inability to speak words of praise, apology, forgiveness, gratitude, love and peace.

In my early years as young boy, my grandmother lived with us and looked after me. She would often tell me things. One thing she said to me I still remember was this "when anyone does anything to you which they shouldn't have done to you, She said to me don't go back and remember it, decide to forget it. And when someone does something kind to you, she said, never forget and always remember the kindness done to you and when you get opportunity, do it for others too".

Just imagine, my grandmother said to me, if everyone in the world did that, what a wonderful place the world would be. Where we make a choice not to remember wrong doings but we gratefully only remember kindness. As a result our whole life will be simply a response in gratitude to kindness.

I think what my wise grandmother was saying to me is this: decide to forget the things that will destroy you. Because if you hear and allow within yourself only destructive things, these will destroy you in such a way that you will in the end, only speak destructive things.

Let's look at our own lives. Do we listen to the voice of God? Do we let the words of Christ sink into our hearts? Do we hear the cry of the poor and the needy in our society?

And like my grandmother, I ask you, imagine what kind of a world it would be if what is happening in today's miracle happen in each of our lives. That I didn't want to hear that which is other than God, that I sought to listen to only those things which would make me a better person.

So Jesus in this wonderful miracle opens our ears not simply that we might be able to hear the Word of God, but that Jesus' Word will have access to my soul, to my inner self. Why? So that what I do, my life will be an expression of what I have received, which is the goodness of God, which is the grace of Jesus Christ.

As Christians we have to follow Christ example. This entails a compassionate concern for those in need of any kind – physical, spiritual, mental – and our caring must be motivated by love. Love heals. Love heals those who give it, and it heals those who receive it.

Love is kind of miracle, and it is a miracle each of us is capable of working. But it is a miracle that escapes us when we take it for granted, when we do not work at it.

If you have food on your tables, you are blessed. If you have a place to call home, you are blessed. If you have relatively good health and people you can call our family and friends, you are blessed. If you are blessed, you are called to be a blessing to others in whatever way possible.

Perhaps this weekend we need to pray: open my ears O Lord, that I might open my heart so that I might follow your command.

May our openness to God bring healing to our brokenness, comfort to our fears and strength to our journey. Amen

Fr Patrick