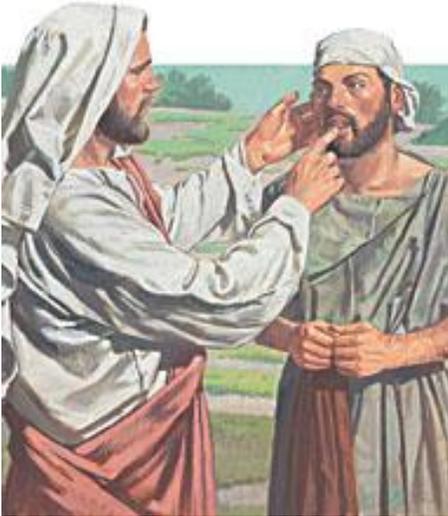


Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

23RD. ORDINARY SUNDAY

Cycle B - September 5, 2021



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.*

All: **Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.**

Leader: *Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice and slanders not with his tongue.*

All: **Whoever does these things shall never be disturbed.**

Leader: *We invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send, Lord your spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Oh God, that you have instructed the hearts of your faithful with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us through the same spirit that always enjoy her divine consolation. By Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FIRST READING [Isaiah 35 (4-7)]

Thus says the Lord:

Say to those whose hearts are 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 mute will sing.

Streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe. The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

The book of the prophet Isaiah is one of the most interesting books in the Bible. Three sections can be clearly distinguished, each written in a different era, and by different authors. The first 39 chapters correspond to a time in which the prophet, carrying a message from God, dedicates his ministry to warning against the infidelity of a people who have received so much from God. This first part is closely linked to the history of the days in which the prophet lived (more or less the year 740 BC). In the second section (Chapters 40 to 55) the message, rather than warning, is comforting, since the exile to Babylon has already occurred. The prophet reveals God's message according to which his people will be rescued again, as in the end it happened. This section was written by one or more disciples of the prophet. And the third part, which completes the book, contains messages regarding religious practice, since the Israelite have already returned to their land, and must live a renewed and more faithful faith than that of their ancestors. This section was written by a "school" of followers of the prophet's thought.

The passage that we are now studying corresponds to a small part, written in apocalyptic language, in which the victory of good over evil is described: Where there was desolation and death, life and abundance now appear. And one of the signs of God's active presence will be, according to the prophet, the healing of the sick. At one time, this text was interpreted as an announcement of the messianic times.

(1) The prophet says that "... water will flow in the desert and streams will flow in the steppe ..." to illustrate the great power of God. Are we aware of the enormous capacity of God to make anything happen?

(2) Let us silently think about some event that seems impossible to us to happen without God's intervention. Something that is not in our hands to achieve. Share.

(3) Have we prayed for what we reflected on in the previous question to happen? Do we have the conviction that it is possible, God willing?

SECOND READING [James 2 (1-5)]

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here, please, " while you say to the poor one, "Stand there, " or "Sit at my feet, " have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?

The conflict between those who have too much and those who have too little is notable in James' Letter. The apostle condemns differences made on the basis of material possessions, and for him it is even more scandalous among Christians.

But, instead of remaining in a condemnation, as for example that of those who promote the class struggle, the apostle does propose a solution that goes to the root of the problem: It is not possible to prevent the continued existence of rich and poor. Nobody has found the formula so that in that sense we are all the same.



So, faced with this reality, what counts is to be realistic and practical. As James proposes, the attitude to take is to recognize that the most important thing is the exercise of fraternal love, which leads to the recognition that we are all equal in the eyes of God. Nobody is superior because they have more money. Nor is anyone superior because he is poor, and consequently preferred by God. That God's preference is not to introduce an element of division, but of compensation. The apostle asks us not to have favorites, and it would be stupid to think that God does, because in the end, God loves us all equally. And that's why he expects us to do the same.

- (1) What is the reason for not practicing favoritism? (Read the first line of this reading and share ideas)
- (2) Read the final part of this reading again. How do you understand this question from the apostle?
- (3) Read Matthew 5 (3). Reflect and share ideas.
- (4) Read Luke 6 (26). Reflect and share ideas.

GOSPEL [Mark 7 (31-37)]

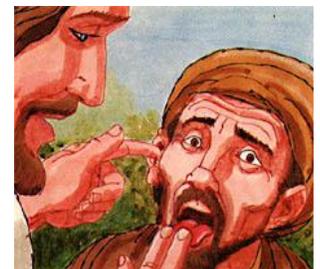
Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him.

He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!"— that is, "Be opened!" — And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.

He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it.

They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

We only find this miracle in Mark. In this episode the messianic power of Jesus Christ manifested, who is capable of carrying out what the prophet Isaiah announced in the first reading. Each action of Jesus contains in itself a teaching, and each gesture of his seeks to make us understand some reality. As we know, by his power, Jesus Christ did not need to perform the miracle in the form in which it unfolded. What is he doing? First, he separates with the sick person, to avoid being seen as a "circus show". He then he uses an element considered to his contemporaries as a healer: saliva. Then he looks up, as a sign of trust in God.



This episode, which occurred in pagan lands, shows those people who is the true God to be followed and worshiped, and Jesus uses his own language to show that the God of Israel is the only one who has the power to perform that wonder. The cured man receives the ability to listen to the word of God and enrich his life. He also receives the gift of speaking, so that he can proclaim God's message.

- (1) Do you remember when your ears were opened to hear the Word of God? How did it happen?
- (2) Has your tongue also been awakened to proclaim the Word of God? If it hasn't happened yet, what's stopping you?
- (3) Why did Jesus command that his miracles should not be disclosed?
- (4) Are we discreet with our successes and "feats" as Jesus wanted to be, or do we take care to make them known?
- (5) The healings of Jesus Christ, were they a means or an end?
- (6) Do the healings that some false prophets claim to do lead to faith in Christ or to the personal fame of those false prophets? Does the Kingdom of God grow with the wonders that some claim to perform?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father ...**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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