

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B/2006

When someone has been struck incessantly in his life by misfortune, it happens very often that he tends to be discouraged, to fall into despair and to take his misery as fatality. This experience, which is common to anyone in the world, is what the people of Israel went through in their lives.

In fact, for many years, various foreign empires and kingdoms had ruled over Israel and subjected the people to the point of reducing them to slavery. Because of the abundance of the adversity, Israel has come, not only to doubt about itself as chosen people, but also to wonder if God's promises made to their ancestors were still valid. Israel has come to consider itself as a dead nation, a deserted place and an arid soil.

It was in that moment that God sent the prophet Isaiah to draw Israel from despair and to give it back courage, to assure it of his fidelity and the victory he was about to give it over their enemies. What is interesting here, however, is the fact that to that political situation which required a political solution, the prophet adds a spiritual and even a cosmic dimension. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the mute will talk, the sand will become a swimming-pool and the desert a streaming water, he said.

Consequently, it is not only a nation that seeks to be set free, not only men and women who long to be saved from their situation of disease and distress, but all the earth yearns for liberation. As St Paul says in his letter to the Romans 8, 20: *"Creation itself will one day be set free from its slavery to decay and will share the glorious freedom of the children of God"*.

The complete fulfillment of this prophecy did not happen in the short term. That is why in Israel, there was a long expectation about the signs of the messianic times. The prophetic tradition, in particular, has always announced that when the Messiah will come all God's promises to his people will become reality. This is what is happening with Jesus as we heard in the Gospel; he fulfills the promises announced by the prophets.

In fact, the Gospel presents Jesus as the messiah of whom the prophets have talked. Thus he cured the deaf and mute man. If he forbids telling anyone about the healing, it is, first of all, so that the people may not confuse their political expectations and the spiritual mission he has received from his Father. He is the messiah, but not in the political sense of someone who comes to liberate his country from political oppression. His primary mission is to set the whole of mankind free from the bondage of sin and perdition. In today's Gospel Jesus assures this liberation by the power of his word and the symbolic gesture of touching and putting his fingers into the ears of the sick.

How shall interpret Jesus healing in today's Gospel? By curing the dumb and deaf man, Jesus gives him the possibility to listen to his word and to respond to it through a responsible act of faith; he offers him the opportunity to enter into dialogue with others. The healing of the mute-deaf represents a victory over human incapacity to listen to one another and to dialogue with one another. We

can dialogue only when we listen to one another. Without listening to one another, there is no possibility of dialogue.

We should not forget, however, that the deaf and mute man was cured, because people brought him to Jesus. This means that he had good friends who cared enough to the point of taking him to Jesus. Those friends had faith enough to believe that if Jesus simply lays his hands upon him, he would be set free. They knew that they were powerless to do anything for him. Their real power laid in their faith, a faith that moved Jesus to loosen his tongue.

All this shows the importance of the community. Because, the community took some initiative to do something for the needy friend, the deaf was healed. His life was transformed, his hearing restored and his speech returned to normal. Sometimes, we feel powerless to help friends who are trapped inside themselves into tensions, depressions and inner pain. But we should not forget that, as a community, it is our duty to bring them to Jesus in our prayers.

All this is to say, in order words, that if Christ heals, consoles and brings out of loneliness, ... all this work has to be done today by his disciples. Such a claim has consequences for the understanding of Christian community. First of all, it means that the Christian community is a place where brothers and sisters should feel really at home and receive equal treatment and consideration.

As we heard St James say in the second reading, a Christian community that discriminates is committing a very serious mistake, because it was constituted as a sign of hope for the poor and the marginalized. The poor in the Bible are not just those who do not have money, but also those who get little in life: the sick, the less educated, the difficult of character, etc. All these people that we shy away from approaching must have a privileged place within a Christian community and enjoy even more attention than others. The Disciples of Christ are called to show that the norms they use to judge people are completely the opposite of those applied in society and in the world.

As you can see, we are confronted with challenges: How can we make the poor and the marginalized feel that the Church is their home? How can we make the concrete sign of brotherhood and sisterhood we live as we gather for the celebration of the Eucharist and the listening of the word of Jesus, that becomes a practice in the course of every day, outside our chapels?

During this celebration, let us ask God to help us understand the importance of the community. Let us bring to loving Jesus all our friends who have troubles of all kinds in their lives so that he may bring them relief and healing. Let us bring him too our own problems, spiritual deafness and illness. Let us enter into dialogue with one another to consolidate our brotherhood and sisterhood. May God bless you all in his Son Jesus Christ! Amen.



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