

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of healing. They show us that God is at the origin of any healing, whether that of a nation or that of an individual. They also invite us to entrust ourselves to God who can heal us physically, spiritually and emotionally.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah foresees in prophecy the restoration of Israel after the exile in Babylon. In fact, the experience of exile was very damaging for the morale of the people of Israel. They started doubting about God's love and promise made to their ancestors. With all that happened to them, they were even wondering if God was still with them.

Drawing from a prophecy, the prophet reassures the people that God has not abandoned them. He will visit them and console them. He will come to vindicate them, to heal those among them who are sick and to restore their country. In this way, men and land alike will benefit from God's favor of salvation.

What is behind this text is the idea that misfortune and misery can sometimes frighten the quietude of the people of God. But, whatever might be the intensity of their suffering, God will always be there to save them and to comfort them. That salvation of God will impact their life and their land, because where God is present, there things become different.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus heals a deaf-mute person. First of all, the Gospel relates that Jesus went into the district of the Decapolis from where people brought to him a deaf man with a speech impediment so that he may heal him.

Taking him aside and treating him with dignity, Jesus healed the sick man whose ears were opened, as he spoke plainly. Wanting to protect his identity as the Messiah, Jesus forbade the people to tell anyone about it. But, the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it because of enthusiasm they had and the impression he left on them.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about the importance of opening the door to the isolated world. What do I mean by that? In fact, we see in the Gospel that the type of the person with whom Jesus deals with belongs to the category of people we call "persons with special needs". Those are people who are, either physically, psychologically or mentally, disabled.

Imagine the world of these people. Imagine what they feel when they cannot see, talk, hear or walk as we do. It is as though, they live in isolation. I do not mean a social isolation, because they certainly have families, friends and people around them who love them and take care of them. What I mean is that the world in which they live is unknown to us who are healthy, because we do not have their impediment.

When such people can meet someone who treats them with dignity, respect and understanding, it changes everything around them. Therefore, it is our duty to care for them, to facilitate their life, to make things easy for them. That is what Jesus did. He did not heal this guy in the middle of the crowd so that he might feel humiliated. He took him aside and showed him respect and consideration.

We have always to remember that we are not only a society of healthy people. We also have the sick and the disabled, the blind, the deaf and the mute. They are human beings like us in spite of their state. Perhaps, today it is they who are sick. But, who knows what tomorrow can bring us?

The drama we face is that our society has built its culture around celebrity and fame. In this context, we run the risk of putting aside people with disabilities and impediment. That is why it is important to look at those people with the eyes of Jesus, to recognize them as God's children and to treat them with love, respect and dignity.

Moreover, as St James said in the second reading, it would be a mistake on our part to discriminate against such people because of their health problems or their social status. On the contrary, we should be, as disciples of Jesus, impartial toward all brothers and sisters and treat anyone with consideration. We have to be welcoming beyond any spectrum.

The second thing I want to talk about is the invisible power of God operating in the sacrament. In fact, in today's Gospel, Jesus does something very strange unless we understand the deep meaning of a sacrament. The Gospel, indeed, says that Jesus took the deaf man aside, he put fingers in his ears, he touched his tongue, he said some words of prayer, and the guy was healed.

All this process reminds us of the sacrament. That is how the sacrament works by the power of God. It involves a simple gesture, like pouring water on the head of someone or touching the hands or the front of someone with holy oil. Then comes the pronouncement of the words of prayer and the action that follows is the power of Jesus acting through the priest in order to give salvation.

That power of Jesus was not something limited to the past, but it is still alive today. In each sacrament, Jesus operates, in an invisible way, through the power of the Holy Spirit to give life to those who receive the sacrament. Each sacrament is, in its own way, an expression of the healing power of Jesus through the hand of the priest.

Let us pray, then, that during this celebration God may help us to understand the importance of respect we have to give to our fellows who are disabled. Let us bring him our own sickness and impediment so that he may heal us. Let us encourage one another to regularly receive the sacrament so that Jesus continues to heal us. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 35: 4-7a; James 2: 1-5; Mark 7: 11-37



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