

## TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B2021

The readings of this Sunday talk about divine healing. They show that it is God who heals and restores us to full integrity of body and mind. They invite us to entrust our sickness to Jesus so that he might heal us.

The first reading describes the consolation of Israel, prophesized by Isaias, as God will bring healing to his people. It shows how that healing will affect the individuals, the whole nation and its land. It shows that the sick will receive a recovery and the land will be transformed.

What is behind this text is the idea that suffering and sickness can frighten the peace of God's people. There is also the idea that whatever might be the intensity of their suffering, God will save them. The last idea is related to the truth that where God is present, everything is different, including the people and the land.

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 how Jesus, who was in the district of the Decapolis, a pagan land, came to heal a deaf-mute man who was brought to him.

Then, the Gospel explains the way Jesus came to heal him by putting his finger in his ears and by touching his tongue. After that the Gospel talks about the injunction Jesus gave him not tell anybody and how the healed man could not stop talking about Jesus and the healing. The Gospel ends up with the astonishment of the people over the healing.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about God's healing. In fact, we all have the experience of suffering, sickness and death. Anytime we are weakened by an ailment, we want to heal. That is the reason why we go to see doctors and nurses in order to seek comfort and remedy. Sometimes, the work of doctors and nurses works and we are healed. At other times, it does not work and we have to accept our fate.

Sometimes again, to our astonishment, the healing occurs even against the verdict of the doctors. In such a case, it is God who has healed us in a miraculous way. This evocation, however, does not mean that God does not heal in ordinary ways, because he still does through the hands of doctors and nurses.

But, the healing that today's Gospel brings to our attention is that which is done in an invisible way through the sacraments of the Church. Let me explain. In today's Gospel, Jesus does something very strange: he takes the deaf-mute man aside, he puts his fingers in his ears, he touches his tongue, he says some words of prayer, and the man is healed.

This process reminds us of the sacrament and the way it works through the power of God. In fact, the sacrament 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 to heal and give salvation is 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 in order 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.

Here comes a question: Why is Jesus healing? Jesus is healing in order to restore the integrity of a person, to give him his dignity back, to get someone out of the isolation in which his sickness brought him. In fact, the type of the person with whom Jesus deals with in the today's Gospel belongs to the category of people we call in our society "persons with special needs". Those are people who are physically, psychologically or mentally disabled.

Imagine the world in which these people live. 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 disabilities.

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 them life, to make things easy for them. That is what Jesus did. He did not heal this guy in the midst of the crowd lest he might feel humiliated or ashamed. 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.

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 to God 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: 31-37**



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