

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B2024

When someone has been repeatedly struck in his life by misfortune, he often tends to be discouraged, to fall into despair and to take his misery as fatality. This common experience that each one of us can do is what the people of Israel went through in their lives as a nation.

For many years, various foreign empires and kingdoms have ruled over Israel and subjected them to the point of reducing them to slavery. Because of the succession and the repetition of such an adversity, Israel has come to doubt about itself as chosen people. They were wondering if God's promises made to their ancestors were still valid. They came to consider themselves as a dead nation, a deserted place and an arid soil.

It was at that moment that God sent them the prophet Isaiah to draw them from despair, to give them courage back, to assure them of his fidelity and to promise them victory over their enemies. What is interesting, however, is that while Israel was dealing with a political situation, which required a political solution, the prophet adds a spiritual and even a cosmic dimension to their expectation. As Isaiah says, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the mute will talk, the sand will become a swimming-pool and the desert streaming water.

Therefore, 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 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".

In the short term, this prophecy of Isaiah was not completely fulfilled. 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.

Today's Gospel in particular presents our Lord as the messiah of whom the prophets have spoken. Thus, he cured the deaf and mute man. If he forbids telling anyone about the healing, it is, first of all, so that 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 coming 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 our Lord assures that liberation by the power of his word and the gesture of touching and putting his fingers into the ears of the sick. Thus, by curing the deaf man, our Lord gives him the possibility of listening to his word and of responding to it through an act of faith. He also 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 our Lord. This means that man had good friends who cared enough to the point of bringing him to our Lord. Those friends had faith enough to believe that if our Lord simply lays his hands upon him, he would heal. They knew that they were powerless to do anything for him. Their real power laid in their faith, a faith that moved our Lord to loosen his tongue.

All this shows the importance of the community and friendship. Because, the community took some initiative to do something for the needy brother, 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 with tensions, depressions and inner pain. But we should not forget that, as a community and friends, it is our duty to bring them to our Lord in our prayers.

In other words, if our Lord heals, consoles and brings out of loneliness, today it is we, his disciples, who have to continue the work he initiated. Such a claim has consequence for the understanding of Christian community. It means that the Christian community is a place where brothers and sisters should care for one another, especially when it is about the sick, the homebound and the lonely people. It also means that each member of our community should feel at home and receive equal treatment and consideration.

As St James said 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, that is, 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 our community and enjoy even more attention than others. As Disciples of Christ, we are called to show that the norms we use to judge people are completely the opposite of those applied in society and in the world.

Here, we face some challenges: How can we make the poor and the marginalized feel that the Church is their home? As we gather for the celebration of the Eucharist and the listening of the word of our Lord, which concrete signs can we perform to show that all of us are brothers and sisters?

During this celebration, let us ask God to help us understand the importance of the community. Let us bring to our Lord 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 our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

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



Homily Date: September 08, 2024
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Document Name: 20240908homily.pdf.