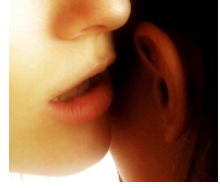




AMDG
23RD SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
YEAR B
5TH SEPTEMBER 2021



**Say to all faint hearts,
'Courage, do not be afraid.
Look, your God is coming to save you!'**

OPENING PRAYER

O God,
by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption,
look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters,
that those who believe in Christ
may receive true freedom
and an everlasting inheritance.

God's word is always calling out to us anew, inviting us to ways of seeing more keenly and hearing more deeply. What are today's readings bringing to my attention?

Isaiah, in the *First Reading*, offers a theme as he calls us to see what needs to be seen, to hear properly, to move lithely and with purpose, and to speak honestly and with joy.

The *Psalms*, also, speaks of profound attentiveness as it invites us to notice the Lord's priorities – the oppressed and needy come before all else. I might ask how this sits with today's culture and with my own daily life-choices?

In both *Second Reading* and *Gospel*, we are left in no doubt about those whom God chooses. Through today's word, the Lord is making an appeal to me – to notice, to be moved and to imitate.

Let's pray, this week, that we ourselves might be opened to the wonders of the Lord and also to his challenges as we try to resist being closed to the plight of those whom God raises to first place.

SECOND READING JAMES 2: 1-5

My brothers and sisters, do not try to combine faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord, with the making of distinctions between classes of people. Now suppose someone comes into your synagogue, beautifully dressed and with a gold ring on, and at the same time a poor person comes in, in shabby clothes, and you take notice of the well-dressed person, and say, 'Come this way to the best seats'; then you tell the poor person, 'Stand over there,' or 'You can sit on the floor by my foot-rest.' Can't you see that you have used two different standards in your mind, and turned yourselves into judges, and corrupt judges at that?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.

Like the two individuals going to the synagogue in this reading, I go to my own place of prayer, be it a seat in the garden, the corner of a quiet room, or wherever. As I do, I notice how I am feeling. What am I bringing with me? How disposed and prepared am I to pray?

When ready, I read the text slowly, listening carefully for the sound of Jesus's voice through James's words. I'm being taught something for my own good and so ponder its message.

I might ask, have I been making distinctions between people?

Or even judging myself?

I take comfort in trusting that the Lord chooses and accepts people as they are, myself included. How might I want to respond to that?

St James is saying that faith is expressed according to one's attitude.

The richness of my faith bears fruit in the choices I make.

What are God's choices and Christ's standards?

Do I hear him, in this reading, inviting me to do likewise?

Should not that be my choice also?

The mind of Christ does not distinguish between class. I, also, am accepted, chosen, and heir to the kingdom.

As I bring this time of prayer to a close, I ponder Christ's choice of me, his gift of faith freely offered and of my own response of love for God and for all people.

Glory be ...

GOSPEL MARK 7: 31-37

Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said, 'he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

Jesus's cure of the man with a speech and hearing impediment is a clear echo of the First and Second Readings. God chooses the weak, the poor, those without capacity, to show that one's level in society counts for nothing.

What is of lasting value is a heart set on God.

As I begin this time of prayer, I might ask that the Holy Spirit help me to see everything through faith, to recognise that power counts for nothing unless it be the power of love.

I might move into prayer by reading the text, noticing what is striking me, or by putting myself in the Gospel, perhaps as the man needing healing.

Where, in my life, do I want to be opened?

However I am praying, I keep my gaze firmly on the person of Jesus and on his priorities, noticing that he is even at pains to avoid the crowd's praise.

By journeying through the more Gentile Decapolis region, Jesus is making a choice – those outside the Jewish law will not be forgotten.

In my daily decision-making, who and what directs my own choices?

Do I notice when others need help? Do I turn a blind eye?

Do I truly listen when someone speaks?

Am I someone who helps others to open up and unburden themselves?

I ponder...

I end, when ready, with a sign of the cross.

Here's a text if you've only got a minute ...

'Courage! Do not be afraid.'

First Reading

The Lord raises up those who are bowed down.'

Psalm

It was those who are poor according to the world that God chose.

Second Reading

'Be opened!'

Gospel

This week's texts if you want to explore further:

Isaiah 35: 4-7; Psalm 145 (146); James 2: 1-5; Mark 7: 31-37



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