

23rd Sunday per Annum - B
Isaiah 35:4-7a;
James 2:1-5;
Mark 7:31-37
Little Flower - 9/ 5/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's first reading, God through Isaiah proclaims to those whose hearts are frightened: "*Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; With divine recompense he comes to save you.*" The words *vindication* and *divine recompense* suggest divine power. However, the remainder of the passage suggests that God's power is the power to give life in all its fullness. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the tongues of the mute will sing. Likewise, there will be an abundance of water, which is essential for life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus cured a man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment. When we read the Gospel stories of Jesus' miracles, we are often tempted to believe that they were random acts of kindness on the part of Jesus. Most often in these miracles Jesus is responding to someone's request or plea. In a very few cases, Jesus himself initiated the miracles. The truth is that Jesus' miracles were not random acts of kindness. Rather they fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the messiah.

The best example of this is when John the Baptist was in prison. He sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one who was to come or should they look for someone else. Jesus response was, "*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them*" [Lk. 7:22]. In other words, Jesus' miracles demonstrated that he was the one who was to come, the promised messiah or savior. We, too, can be life giving if we reach out in love and service to others, especially to those in need. When we do, we give witness to Jesus' presence, power, and activity among us.

The other interesting thing about this miracle story is the importance of touch. The people who brought the man to Jesus begged him to lay his hand on him. We are told that Jesus put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue. Physical touch plays an important role in the Gospels. Likewise, physical touch plays an important role in our lives, especially in expressing love or friendship. Some of you may remember when someone, perhaps Dr. Fauchi, suggested we might never be able to return to shaking hands. As we all know, physical touch is an important sign of love and friendship.

Today's reading from James challenges us not to show partiality among people, especially in Liturgy. He cites as an example giving preference in seating at Eucharist to the seemingly wealthy as opposed to the seemingly poor. When I was in New Orleans for a Canon Law convention, we visited a church where in the past white people sat on the main level and black people were relegated to the balcony. In that church the balcony was not like our choir loft. It surrounded the whole church.

The words of Paul to the Galatians are most appropriate: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" [Gal. 3:28]. According to Paul, Jesus relativized all distinctions. Paul's statement does not sound radical to us, but it was radical in his time. Jews considered themselves saved; non-Jews were not saved. Free people were persons; slaves were non-persons under the law. Men considered themselves and were considered superior to women. However, because of Jesus, all are now one and, therefore, equal.

My brothers and sisters, from the moment I arrived at Little Flower, many visitors and new parishioners told me how welcome they have felt here. As a community, we are welcoming. Part of this is that we accept people as they are. Overall we do not judge people by their clothes or appearance or lifestyle. Thank you to all of you who reach out to welcome new faces.