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A homily for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, September 9, 2018 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B

First Reading: Isaiah 35:4–7a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146:6–10 | **Response:** Psalm 146:1b

Second Reading: James 2:1–5

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:23

Gospel Reading: Mark 7:31–37

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Tonight we hear about the healing miracles of Jesus. I suppose Jesus could have healed the rich and famous but instead he heals the people who are on the margins of Society.

Jesus heals a physically impaired person, a man who is both deaf and suffers from a speech impediment. He was truly on the margins of Jewish society, but Jesus, not wanting to draw attention to himself, goes out and heals him and asks that they tell no one of what he did.

How often sometimes do we crave to be associated with the rich and famous. I suppose it is part of our ‘celebrity culture’ that we try and make our lives look as good as possible. We want the perfect selfie, the best Instagram background, that elusive viral post and social media profile that highlights all of our abilities and showcases our talents. Imagine for a moment, however, what life would be like if we were disabled. If we were truly in need of healing. How would we react to Jesus coming and healing us? Would we want Jesus to favour only the rich and powerful? No, of course not – we would be ecstatic that Jesus would desire

us. And that's what Jesus does, he desires us – as we are. Each time we come to Mass he offers us himself and wants to open our minds and hearts to the reality of his love for the World.

Though we hear this evening Jesus say “Ephphatha” an Aramaic word preserved in the Greek text which means to open, it also means to perceive.

Let us this evening think how do we perceive the world? Are we drawn to honours and riches? To associating with the rich and powerful? Or are we able to see with the eyes of God how truly dignified and in God's image each creature is. How true are the words we hear in the 2nd reading this evening: God has chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him.

As we heard in the psalm, the Lord sets prisoners free – what a liberating message that is for us – because it means we do not have to compete in the world for riches, fame, honour or glory, in order to obtain the Love of God. No – God loves each of us right now – we do not have to be ‘successful’. We could be, and that's ok. But we do not have to be. What a weight off our minds, what a freedom – when we learn the value of the lesson that we do not have to compete. And that's what God wants us to be, free – not imprisoned in our fears and expectations.

In our first reading the prophet Isaiah foretells of what happens with the coming of the Kingdom of God – that the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Perhaps the grace of God that we must pray for tonight is that of an opening of our minds and hearts to others.

May the Lord bless you with understanding – an understanding not only of the free gift of love from God, but also an understanding that we do not have to compete or be perfect in order to be valuable to God. And if that is what we truly understand, then we will not find ourselves being partial, as St James warns against. We will welcome everyone because they are all beloved child of God.

In our society today we do not welcome everyone as we should. We create outsiders and insiders; cliques and groups. But Jesus is tonight asking us to open our minds and our hearts and to perceive the world differently. Let's pray tonight for that grace to see the world as God sees it; to hear the cries of the poor that God hears; to use our gifts and talents for the benefit of the common good – and not for the private and privileged few. Let us ask the Lord to unblind us from the prejudices we might hold but not be aware of. We might be closed off to foreigners or those different from ourselves, whether different because of their tribe, tongue or culture; their gender or sexuality. As Christians we are commanded to be radically inclusive. To welcome everyone to the feast and to not judge – for none of us are truly worthy, and yet that is why there is such great joy among the disciples in the Gospel – because they witnessed the Good News of Jesus in their lives and they felt compelled to share that with others. Perhaps we are afraid of the challenge to be inclusive, but we are told in our first reading to not be afraid.

When the man was healed we are told Jesus sighed. In fact that word is better translated as groaned. In other words it took some effort on Jesus' part. Healing was not without cost. As Fr James Martin has said: At the moment in our church it is not just ourselves as individuals that need to have our hearts and minds opened in order to better perceive; we as a whole church need to perceive the current crisis in our Church around sexual abuse, and in the laity at the moment I believe Jesus is groaning and working so that the deaf and mute church might be healed. For too long the church has been deaf to the cries of abuse victims and their families as well as mute about its own criminal activity and cover-up. Is not Jesus asking us all right now to bring it out into the open, so that it can be met, named, healed and changed. So that the church can once again, as the deaf and mute man did, "speak plainly."

Let us tonight not dwell on the sins in our life; but rather let us count our blessings; let us rejoice in being called to a greater openness and inclusivity, and let us pray for a Church that no longer hides or covers-up her sins, but repents and preaches the Good News – not in order to glorify itself, but so as to Praise God alone. If we do this, then we can all acclaim as we did in the Psalm: "Praise the

Lord, O my soul” – for praise and gratitude are the only emotions that are truly befitting of us as Christians, and only the Truth will set us free. We should not be afraid of the Truth, though it might come at a cost, it is what Christ commands, and we must conform ourselves to Him who is the way, the truth and the life. Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2018-09sep-09-yb-ot-23/>

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