

23TH SUNDAY ORD. (B)
HERE IS YOUR GOD, HE COMES TO SAVE YOU

Today we hear about God promising to restore into health all those who were afflicted with various physical impediments. The prophet Isaiah was given this message to the Israelites at a time they had shut their ears to hear the word of God and refused to see the good things God had done. There was the idea that there was no hope for them when in exile, but God assured them that there was hope. They were told to be strong and not to fear, because God was coming to save them.

The Israelites had the belief also that physical ailment like blindness, deafness, leprosy, and being lame or crippled was the consequences of sin, and that God was angry with that person. Thus the one suffering is being punished. An example is what the disciples asked Jesus about the man born blind: "As He went along, Jesus saw a man born blind. His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?' Neither he nor his parents sinned, Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him,'" (Jn.9:1-3).

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in Jesus as He healed the deaf and dumb man, which we heard in the gospel. The actions of Jesus in curing the man were an indication that God has come as man (in the flesh) to save us; "He put His finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then He looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Be opened". That was the human touch, and divine power exhibited in Jesus.

The response of the people after the man was healed, takes us back to creation, when all things were created good. "They were exceedingly astonished and they said, 'He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak". So it is God who can restore us to our original well-being. No human ability or capability can restore the wholeness of life we yearn for.

The second reading also reminds us of the fact that God cares not only for those afflicted with sickness, but the poor as well. St. James told the believers not to discriminate between the poor and the rich, because God chose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him.

Jesus has the power to heal us both physically and spiritually. We may think that we are well, but we may be spiritually blind, dumb and deaf due to sin. It is difficult for us to see the goodness of God in our lives. We fail to experience His power working in our lives day and night. Maybe that is why we find it difficult to appreciate who we are, and the life we enjoy every day. We lament over difficulties and problems we encounter every day in our lives forgetting that He is there to rescue us. This is His message: "Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not!"

We are afraid, and our hearts are troubled, because we have closed our ears to His message of hope for us. We have exchanged the truth of God with a lie from the devil who says the world is for him when he tempted Jesus; (Mt. 4:8-9). How many of us have the courage to talk about our faith in public, or share the word of God with others? We are dumb because of the fear of what others may say. Those who saw what happened to the man did not keep quiet; they proclaimed it even though Jesus did not want them to do that.

These messages are to remind us of how we should also care for our unfortunate brothers and sisters who are facing all kinds of troubles in life. We can do that if we have the mind and heart of God and not just follow our passions. In many ways the modern society is trying to eliminate those we consider 'liabilities' because of their situations in life, as Pope Francis always describes as "a throw-away-society". There are some people who want to help, but even then it may be like out of pity and not because of the love they have for them. We have put tags on people due to various reasons, and scorn them.

God comes to save me from everything I can think of - sickness, poverty, weaknesses and sins. Christ has made all things well and wants to make my life well too. If I allow Him, He will take me away from the influence of the society to make me a new person who can see and hear God every day and experience His love for me. He wants to take me away from the society which is polluted with noise and evil activities to a place where I can find healing and peace. He wants me to be in the world but not of the world.

