

23rd Sunday of the Year B

*Say to all faint hearts,
"Courage! Do not be afraid.
Look, your God is coming." (Is 35:4)*



First Reading

Isaiah 35:4-7

Say to all faint hearts, "Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; he is coming to save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy; for water gushes in the desert, streams in the wasteland, the scorched earth becomes a lake, the parched land springs of water.

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 a man comes into your synagogue, beautifully dressed and with a gold ring on, and at the same time a poor man comes in, in shabby clothes, and you take notice of the well-dressed man, and say, "Come this way to the best seats"; then you tell the poor man, "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.

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".

Meditation

We have all heard of tragic cases of children walled in solitude because they are blind, deaf and dumb from birth. The devotion and skill of language specialists sometimes succeed in opening these sufferers to the world of signs and of speech. But what is to be done when the eyes, ears and tongue of the heart are blocked? How many people, how many couples there are who "don't understand each other," who "no longer speak to each other!" How many "dialogues of the deaf" there are between persons, groups, institutions or nations where there is no longer any mutual trust, acceptance of others in their fragility and respect for what they bring.

Such situations can help us to grasp the symbolic significance of the healing of the deaf-mute. Faced with people who have grown deaf to his preaching and who do not listen to his appeals for conversion, Jesus has moved on into pagan territory. He has come to open ears and loosen tongues. He wants us to be capable of listening and of entering into the dialogue of salvation which baptism establishes between God and his people. To those of us who are closed – the rich, the powerful, the proud, the self-sufficient – Jesus commands: "Be opened!"

Be opened, Christian, to listen and receive the teachings of the gospel! Be opened to speak your faith with your whole life! Be opened to allow your "Our Father" to pass into all your works! Then how eloquently our lives would speak, how they would refer to Jesus Christ! The entire world could not help but say: "He has done everything well! He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!"