

Twenty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time – B Cycle

September 2, 2012

INTRODUCTION: Today's first reading takes us back to the time of Moses right before God's people were to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land. Moses knew he would die before they crossed the Jordan. So he had some last words instructing and encouraging God's people before he parted from them. In essence he is telling God's people that God loves his people and he wants them to prosper. They will do so only if they keep God's laws. This passage fits well with our other two readings which teach us how important it is for our well-being in this world and our eternal happiness in the next to obey God.

HOMILY: It would take about four days to get from Jerusalem to Galilee, if you had to walk. Most people walked at the time of Jesus. So when we hear the beginning of today's gospel, that the Pharisees and some scribes from Jerusalem came together to observe Jesus, we know immediately that something is up, and these religious leaders were not interested in just saying "hello."

Right away they question Jesus as to why his disciples ate without washing their hands. Now washing hands before eating is a good practice. For the Pharisees, however, it was considered to be an offense against God. There was no law of God commanding it. It was part of an oral tradition that was presumed to have come down from Moses.

Jesus' response on the issue of hand washing went further than that issue alone. He attacked the very principle behind it, the principle that what we eat can make us unworthy to stand before God. It is part of Jewish law, as we all know, that Jews were not allowed to eat certain foods such as pork and shellfish. Jesus, on this occasion, made a pronouncement that dietary laws would no longer be binding. "Nothing that enters a person from outside can defile a person; but the things that come out from within are what defile," he said. This statement would have been enough to condemn Jesus as a lawbreaker and as a person who leads others to break God's laws. Jesus saw himself, however, as having the authority to interpret God's law and on various occasions, he didn't hesitate to do so. I might digress by noting that He also saw himself as having the authority to forgive sins, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cast out demons, to calm the stormy sea, to demand obedience to his word and to teach people about God and God's kingdom. People ask, did Jesus know he was God? He certainly acted as if he knew he was.

We must remember when we hear Jesus' statement, "Nothing that enters a person from outside can defile a person..." Jesus is only talking about food. There were no magazines, books, movies or internet at Jesus time. Jesus is not talking about other things, such as pornography (which is a big industry today), that some people feed their minds and hearts with; he's not talking about recreational drugs that people feed themselves with. These things do not do them any good in their relationship with God or with others.

Our scriptures today are an encouragement to obey God. God's grace, which is a sharing in God's life and the path to eternal joy, calls us to a life of holiness. Moses, in the first reading, told God's people that God's law was a gift that would give evidence of wisdom and intelligence in those who followed God's law. James, in the second reading, is completely practical all through his letter, telling us that faith without works is dead. "We must be doers of the word and not hearers only." In today's gospel, Jesus gives a long list of sinful tendencies that are found in all human hearts, tendencies that we all struggle against in one form or another. These tendencies reveal why Jesus had to come to us, to help us to have love in our hearts: the love of God and love for each other. Amen.

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – B Cycle

Sept. 9, 2012

INTRODUCTION: The prophet Isaiah is speaking to God's people during their captivity in Babylon: "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God...he comes to save you." God's salvation is expressed in terms of healing the blind and the deaf, the lame and the mute. The desert would come alive with rivers and springs and an abundance of life-giving water. The reading prepares us for the gospel where Jesus heals a man who was a deaf mute. Jesus' healing work was a work of compassion, but it also announced in a dramatic way God's saving presence among his people. In our own times of trial, we need to remind ourselves over and over again of these words of Isaiah: "Here is your God...he comes to save you."

HOMILY: There was an old grandfather who was almost stone deaf. Without telling any of his family, he decided to go to a doctor and get a set of hearing aids that allowed him to hear almost perfectly. When grandfather went back to the doctor for his monthly checkup, the doctor said to him, "I'll bet your family were really surprised and delighted to discover that you could now hear. He said, "I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen. I've already changed my will three times." Well, it's a funny story, but as we age and lose some of our abilities or faculties it is not very humorous.

Jesus, in today's gospel, healed a man who was deaf and hardly able to speak. His need was very great in that he had to have friends bring him to Jesus. We see Isaiah's prophecy, which we heard in today's first reading, is beginning to be fulfilled. God is coming to save his people. We look forward to its completion in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus is creating a new world by "doing all things well."

We also see a message in this particular healing. Jesus wants us all to have our ears open to his word and to proclaim it. If we have trouble hearing what he wants to tell us, all we need to do is to ask him to open our ears for us. He will be only too glad to help.

When we were baptized, the priest or deacon touched our ears and our mouth in imitation of

Jesus and said: "The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father." At the time of Jesus, spittle was viewed as a vehicle for supernatural power, and folk medicine (even advocated by "professional" physicians) at that time thought it had healing power. Especially for a holy person like Jesus, it was considered powerful. I wonder if we retain some of that concept even today when parents give their child a little kiss if the child skinned their knee or hurt themselves somewhere. Anyway, the minister of baptism doesn't use spittle any more - just his prayer and his touch.

It seems to have become more popular lately for people to openly declare that they are Catholics or Christians. It takes more than just going thru a baptismal ceremony to make that claim with any genuine sincerity. Having our ears opened and being called to proclaim our faith (whether by preaching it or living it) is an on-going process. That's why we encourage reading the Scriptures and why so much of the Mass is focused on God's word. May we all continue to have open ears and hearts to God's word, especially Jesus who is the Word of God. Amen.