

Pentecost 15 (23 Ordinary Sunday) Year B - 6 September 2015

Readings: Isaiah 35:4-7a, James 2:2-17, Mark 7:24-37, Psalm 146

Theme: Total Inclusion

"They were astounded beyond measure saying, 'He has done everything well, he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'"

*In the Name of the Father: and of the Son; and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

My dear friends, the theme for our reflection today and through the week is total inclusion. How is our relationship with our neighbours and people we come across in our everyday life? How does our attitude reflect the fact that we are created in the same image of God and for a purpose? Put in another way, what is our attitude to those in need and in distress?

In the first reading, we hear the voice of the Prophet Isaiah giving words of encouragement to those in distress and needs which extends words of comfort to the marginalised. He assures them that the time is coming when God will solve their problems. Situations hardly change. Isaiah might as well be speaking to us today with increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in our news daily.

In the second reading, James in his address to Christians warned them about favouritism to the rich. He gives examples with what one would regard as the familiar things that happen in most societies. He asked Christians to be relentless in their work of charity for that is the only sign that we have faith. He encourages Christians not be wanting in acts of charity. Concluding, he has this to say "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill' and yet you do

not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead"

Making a fuss over a wealthy benefactor at the liturgy while at the same time humiliating a poor person makes nonsense of what we say we believe. The measure of how we fare as a church is not how we treat the rich among us, good as it is to have them, but it is how we treat the poor and the marginalised.

In the Gospel, we hear Jesus performing the messianic miracles that heralds the signs of the times. This is in line with what Isaiah said in the first reading.

By the time of Jesus, many religious traditions were in place which served to differentiate between those who were on the inside and those who were outsiders. This led to divisions, inequality and oppression - the very thing the covenant was supposed to eradicate. So when Jesus reached out to the poor, to sinners and those on the margins he was bringing into focus once again the type of world God wanted. His was a love that included everyone and which could not be bought.

In commanding that the ears of the dead man be opened, there is a message to all of us, especially those who think that their hearing is perfect.

Our ability to really hear the good news can be limited by many things, especially closed minds and hearts. Perhaps as individuals and as a community our prayers during this Sunday Eucharist might be that we would be opened to all the transformation that God wants to work on us. Perhaps a take-away message is that God wants all of us to show dignity and respect towards the marginalised.

What message does the image of the Syrian child who drowned in an attempt to get to safety give to all of us today?

As individuals, are we doing enough to the marginalised. Does it occur to you that where you are is accident of history? None of us decided where we were to be born or who are parents were going to be.

Why do some of us behave as if we are the be all and end all?

We have a limited span of life. Not all of us will live to be hundred. But in a hundred and more years from now there still will be people in this church if it is still there but it won't be you or I. Perhaps people would have forgotten that we ever existed.

The consolation and hope is that there is a place prepared for us where we will belong forever. So in the world which is our temporary abode, we should do all we can to be accommodating to those who are less fortunate and happen to find themselves struggling through no fault of their own.

Today my friends let us reflect on these.

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**