



Reflections on the readings for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time– September 9, 2018
Isaiah 35:4-7a Ps. 146:6-10(1b) James 2:1-5 Mark 7:31-37

Praise the Lord, my Soul! Be strong, fear not! Show no partiality! Listen! Be opened!

The readings this week offer a powerful message that speaks to the heart of all people living in these times of challenge, of despair and outrage. The poetry of Isaiah soars as he tells us that God promises to come with healing and blessings and all will be free to sing and dance for joy! It is clearly eschatological /focused on the future. And yet Jesus reminds us that the **Reign of God is right here, right now**. His curing of the deaf man indicates this reality.

Jesus goes to the hostile regions neighboring Galilee. This “unknown preacher” from Nazareth comes to proclaim the so-called “Good News”. Jesus is aware of the deafness, blindness and spiritual paralysis of the people there and he desires to open their hearts in a new way. People bring a deaf man to him for healing. It is to be noted that some rabbinic sources consider a deaf person, “heresh,” similar to being a minor (Heb “qatan”) or mentally ill (“shoteh”). Such people are not considered responsible for observing the law. **In Mark's gospel**, we see Jesus departing from his normal way of simply healing by word alone. He uses touch as well. “Be opened”, he says as he spits on his finger and places it into the man's ears and touches his tongue. Mark's “messianic secret” not to tell anyone simply causes the people to want to immediately spread the Good News and say that “he has done all things well.” Once again this echoes Isaiah and the message that followed the destruction the Israelites suffered. It is a message of consolation, freedom from slavery and healing of hearts.

Psalm 146 continues this great message of justice, freedom, protection and love from our Creator God. It is also a reminder that God uses us to bring this future promise to the present day with our continued work to be countercultural and to reach out to those most vulnerable in our societies.

The **letter of James** insists that we LISTEN! Stand still before Jesus! Be aware that we are all sisters and brothers and loved by the same God who created us. We all share that divinity from God. The reality is: **I AM** the poor, the deaf, the lonely. Whatever we do to the least of these we do to the God of all. God stands with the poor and not with oppressors. Going back as far as Deuteronomy 16:19-20 we hear “Justice shall you pursue”. The Tanakh admonishes judges not to favor one litigant over another. It was important to listen to each one and to seek truth and justice.

These messages are most relevant to what is happening in our countries, our Church, our parishes, our societies. We find today words of hope and new life in the midst of seeming desolation, confusion.

For reflection: God is right here for us. How can you be “here” for God? With the swirling negatives I encounter each day, where do I find strength and courage to ever feel like “leaping and singing”? Where do I find springs of transformation to refresh my spirit?

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