

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTONARY #128

READING I Isaiah 35:4-7a

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:

Say to those whose hearts are frightened:

Be strong, fear not!

Here is your God,

he comes with vindication,

with divine recompense

he comes to save you.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,

the ears of the deaf be cleared,

then will the lame leap like a stag,

then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Streams will burst forth in the desert,

and rivers in the steppe.

The burning sands will become pools,

and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

Isaiah = T2AV-uh

Accent "your." God is personal.

Practice so you can deliver the line looking

directly at the assembly. Pause slightly

to let the beauty of the promise soak in.

Use energy and build some speed as the

list of good things and miracles promised

tumble out with enthusiasm. Bring attention

to the verbs; they illustrate a joyous renewal.

Steppe = step = grassland

READING I

Isaiah addresses those

whose hearts are fright-

ened (*lenimhary-lev* in Hebrew), a po-

tenentially misunderstood phrase for

contemporary English speakers. For Isaiah,

the heart is a place of intellect rather than

emotions, meaning that it is best under-

stood as the "mind." Moreover, Isaiah's

verb (*mahar* in Hebrew) connotes swift

movement—like flowing water—and is

often translated "to hasten" or "to act

quickly." So, Isaiah addresses the "hasty of

mind." Centuries later, Greek translators

render Isaiah's expression as "*oligopsuchoi*

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te *dianoia*," meaning "those who are dispir-
ited of mind" or "those whose minds have
hasty thinking), while Greek-speaking audi-
ences took Isaiah to be highlighting the
care needed when thinking through dis-
couragement (i.e., slow thinking). Either
way, Isaiah calls for healing emotionally
wounded minds by emphasizing God's
might and divine recompense. A divine lev-
elling of justice would come. Moreover, God
will heal and provide abundant resources,
even in places where resources are limited.
The blind will see. The lame will leap. The
mute will sing. Waters and streams will
spring forth in the desert. Put simply, God

thinking through the emotion of panic (i.e.,
calling for the kind of care needed when
ers would have understood Isaiah to be
stood this, indeed, ancient Hebrew speak-
tional ones. Yet thoughts and emotions are
healing mental wounds more than emo-
Accordingly, Isaiah's message is about
with negative feelings (e.g., fear).
ing those with troubled minds, not those
speakers understood Isaiah to be address-
little motivating spirit." Thus, ancient Greek
care needed when thinking through dis-
hasty thinking), while Greek-speaking audi-

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10 (1b)

R. Praise the Lord, my soul! or R. Alleluia.

The God of Jacob keeps faith forever,

secures justice for the oppressed,

gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets captives free.

The Lord gives sight to the blind;

the Lord raises up those who were

bowed down.

The Lord loves the just;

the Lord protects strangers.

The fatherless and the widow the

Lord sustains,

but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The Lord shall reign forever;

your God, O Zion, through all

generations. Alleluia.

A reading from the Letter of Saint James

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality

as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes

comes into your assembly,

and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in,

and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes

and say, "Sit here, please,"

while you say to the poor one, "Stand there,"

or "Sit at my feet,"

have you not made distinctions among yourselves

and become judges with evil designs?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.

Did not God choose those who are poor in the world

to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom

that he promised to those who love him?

For meditation and context:

In this passage, James is calling the community to task for their un-Christian behavior.

After giving an example of what was

happening, James points out why their

behavior is problematic.

Despite their behavior, James maintains his care for the community, adding the endearment "beloved" (not found in the initial address).

The preferential option for the poor is not

a new, contemporary social justice teaching

but a teaching from Jesus, exemplified

in his ministry. Do our lives demonstrate

this priority?

READING II

will wipe away all reason for doubt and restore faith among the chosen people.

James addresses economic inequality and favoritism in the early Church. The dilemma, according to James, does not lie in the existence of economic inequality but in the community's response to it. James does not call for demanding that the rich become poor or that the community work strenuously to increase the wealth of the less fortunate. Therefore, James seems to consider eco-

conomic inequality an unavoidable reality of life. Evidently, some members of the early Church enjoyed wealth and possessions while others did not. However, James is perfectly clear about how a disciple of Jesus should appropriately respond to such economic inequality. Disciples of Christ must avoid giving greater deference and care to those with economic means. They must also avoid neglecting or shunning those of lesser means or lower economic status. Instead, comparable care and attention must be given to all members of the community regardless of economic sta-

tus. For James, Jesus' disciples might accept the economic inequality as an inevitable reality of life, but they cannot rightly appeal to it as grounds for treating members of the community differently. The rationale and the wisdom of the proper behavior Christians should take springs from God's care for people. As James points out, when God shows favoritism, the preference lies with the poor. After all, God chose the poor to be "heirs of the kingdom," and it is the poor whom God enriches with faith. Where Isaiah speaks of God restoring interior deficiencies, James

GOSPEL Mark 7:31-37

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, and into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. 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, "*Ephphatha!*"—that is, "Be opened!"—And immediately the man's ears were opened, and his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them **not** to tell anyone. But the **more** he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly **astonished** and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

focuses on God's (and Christians') care for exterior matters. Today's Gospel passage recounts Jesus' healing of a man who was unable to hear or speak. Given that Mark is the shortest Gospel, we get a somewhat surprisingly detailed description of Jesus' healing, including the distinctive manner by which he performs the deed, as well as the instruction he provides once the man is restored. Notably, the term used by Jesus—"ephphatha"—is Aramaic rather than Greek (which is the primary language of the New Testament). By preserving this word in its original language, Mark points to the veracity of the account and may highlight an early tradition of the Church that used this word in ritual healing ministry. Of course, at the heart of such ministry in the Church is the sacrament of baptism, which heals our mortal woundedness and restores us to a description of Jesus' healing, including the manner by which he performs the deed, as well as the instruction he provides once the man is restored. Notably, the term used by Jesus—"ephphatha"—is Aramaic rather than Greek (which is the primary language of the New Testament). By preserving this word in its original language, Mark points to the veracity of the account and may highlight an early tradition of the Church that used this word in ritual healing ministry. Of course, at the heart of such ministry in the Church is the sacrament of baptism, which heals our mortal woundedness and restores us to a description of Jesus' healing, including the distinctive manner by which he performs the deed, as well as the instruction he provides once the man is restored. Notably, the term used by Jesus—"ephphatha"—is Aramaic rather than Greek (which is the primary language of the New Testament). By preserving this word in its original language, Mark points to the veracity of the account and may highlight an early tradition of the Church that used this word in ritual healing ministry. Like the deaf-mute man, we too, through baptism, can come to hear the Gospel and proclaim it openly. Moreover, through this ministry of "opening," we recognize that Jesus accomplishes both internal and external restoration, thereby fulfilling the messages of both Isaiah and James in today's first and second readings. E.W.

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E.W.

Let "exceedingly astonished" be heard.

if hearing it for the first time.

and powerful. Proclaim this miracle story as "immediately" shows God's word is effective

Ephphatha = EF-uh-thuh

in ear, spit).

tactile and bodily aspects of the cure (finger

Jesus prays and acts. Do not cringe at the

who is acting.

Practice so all of the masculine pronouns make sense and you can clearly distinguish

Decapolis = dih-KAP-uh-lis

Sidon = Si-duhn

Tyre = tir