



Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
† Sunday 9th September 2018

In England & Wales – Cycle of Prayer:

For Racial Justice and those who suffer persecution and denial of human rights

Keynote: Courage! Your God is with you!

Prophet Isaiah 35: 4-7

After the invasion of Jerusalem, the defeated inhabitants were led away to slavery in Babylon. As was the custom following the sack of a city, many of their leaders and artisans, would have had their eyes put out, their ears cut off; many would have had their tongues cut out. Now when the prophet proclaims, *'Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming... 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 deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy'*, these long suffering exiles, deprived of sight, unable to work as metal workers, carpenters or at other occupations, these will be the first to see their salvation coming, for their eyes will be opened and all the exiles will sing for joy! The prophet is giving encouragement to all people who suffer affliction, hardship and despair. *'Do not be afraid... God is coming to save you.'*

Responsorial Psalm 145 (146): 7-10 – A song in praise of God's fidelity

Letter of James 2: 1-5

We should understand that the example of the two people, one dressed in shabby clothes, and one beautifully attired wearing a gold ring, presupposes that these two visitors are unknown to the local community. They are treated differently because of their outward appearance, and apparent wealth shown by one of them. James is challenging the people of his own community. This is a challenge for Christians today too, as we face issues of abuse, prejudice and racial discrimination. James condemns the double standards at work when we allow superficial prejudices to rule our actions. The Apostle reminds us that, *'it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose to be rich in faith and to be the heirs of the Kingdom.'*

Gospel according to Mark 7: 31-37

The evangelist packs in a number of 'messages' in this text. Some commentators see the roundabout route taken by Jesus on this journey, as evidence that he was already reaching out to the gentile, non-Jewish people to offer them the teaching of the Kingdom of God. The selection of the *'deaf man who had an impediment in his speech'* to demonstrate the healing power of God, may underline the message in Isaiah, *'then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed.'* For these are the true signs of the mercy of God and the coming of the Kingdom. The fact that the 'deaf man' is instructed not to speak about the healing, may indicate that Jesus is not yet ready to reveal himself fully. But you try telling someone who has a terrible stammer and has just found speech, not to speak! I feel that the evangelist, or even Jesus himself may have said this with a wry smile. Knowing only too well that the good news would travel far and wide, as the healed man ran to tell his family and friends of his good fortune! At our baptism our own ears and eyes were opened to God's word. The evangelist Mark would have us be more ready to be witnesses and willing to share the Gospel – the good news. Good news travels well!

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