

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's Mass we are reminded that God offers us courage, invites us to love without exception and brings us to healing and wholeness.

"Look, your God is coming," says the prophet Isaiah. Let us prepare for the Lord's coming by asking his forgiveness and mercy for our sins.

Isaiah 35:4-7

God offers courage to everyone with faith.

James 2:1-5

Do not be deferential to people with riches or power.

Mark 7:31-37

Jesus went to a Gentile area, the Decapolis, (ten cities) in eastern Palestine. A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him for healing. The gestures Jesus used were gestures used by healers at that time. Jesus put his hands in the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle, Then he groaned, "Be opened" (Aramaic, "**Ephphatha**," (an optional ceremony at Baptisms today). Jesus looked to heaven, the divine source of his healing power, and with word and touch, the man's hearing and speech were restored.

Jesus fulfilled the Messianic promise that "the deaf shall hear" and "the mute will sing" (Is 29:18, 35:6).

This miracle performed for a Gentile was another sign that Jesus had come to bring salvation to **EVERYONE**



Reflection

On a Friday morning, September 1st, a young student made his way to the cathedral to attend Mass. It was the first Friday of the month, a devotional day for confession and communion. While the Mass was being said, you could hear the scream of sirens and the loud noise of explosions. After Mass, that student went with the priest to a vantage point on the city walls to see what was happening. Fighter planes and bombers were attacking targets near by. A vast motorised army of a million and a half men were rapidly approaching. It was what was called, the blitzkrieg. The year was 1939, the city was

Krakow and the young student was called Karol Wojtyla.

Karol Wojtyla hurriedly said goodbye to the priest and ran off to find his father. Together they set off eastwards, away from the advancing army. The roads were jammed with people, running away from the front. They travelled for a hundred miles, surviving strafing attacks from low-flying German aircraft. Eventually they met some Russian soldiers who told them that they'd probably be better going back home. So they turned round and went back to Krakow.

This was the beginning of a turbulent life for the young student. Ahead of him lay years of oppression and harassment - for himself and for his Polish people, first under the Nazi occupation, and afterwards, under years of Communist rule. Their loss of freedom resulted in a lifetime of, what you might call, 'internal exile', with all the frustration and injustice that that brings. In the meantime, the young student became a priest; the priest became a teacher of philosophy; eventually that teacher of philosophy was made a bishop, and finally that bishop of Krakow, became the bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II.

The man who stood on the balcony of St Peter's in Rome, that October evening in 1978, had come a long way from the young, fair-haired student who stood on the city walls of Krakow all those years before. He'd learnt a lot of things and one of things he'd learned was **not to be afraid**. He'd come to realise that the evil forces of this world are nothing to fear. Instead, they need to be met head-on and faced up to.

That's why, in his opening sermon as Pope, Karol Wojtyla said to the waiting world, and especially to the people in Poland and elsewhere, who were suffering under oppression, "**Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ. Open, to his saving power, the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilisation and development. Do not be afraid!**" People listening,

recognised that this message was not just a religious message, it was also a political one. This wasn't sacristy religion! NO! The Church had to engage with the world.

The words of Isaiah today promote the same message. From the land of exile and suffering, the prophet proclaims **liberation**. This wasn't



just a pipe-dream – it was a promise; it wasn't just consolation – it was commitment. Isaiah protested against evil, but also expressed a determination to fight it. Isaiah was a prophet of faith, and faith is certainly not a daydream; faith is a determination to engage with the world around us. A life of faith expresses itself in an ability to listen to other people and to connect with them. This is something the world lacks. Mutual

understanding between peoples and nations is a rare thing. We don't see patient listening and gentle responses very often. Like the handicapped man in the gospel today, we are often **deaf** to other people and **poor** in our efforts to communicate with them.

Coming into the region of the Decapolis, Jesus was asked to cure that deaf man, who'd also got a speech impediment. Jesus took the man away from the noise of the crowd, and communicated quietly with him, letting him know what he was going to do. By sign and by touch, by prayer and by command, Jesus restores the man's hearing and his ability to speak. "EPHATHA" – Mark keeps the word as Jesus had spoken it – in his own tongue Aramaic. Mark then explains that it means **"Be open"**.

"He has done well", the people say.

The long-awaited Messiah, who had come in Jesus, brought justice

and peace to the earth, - and also a knowledge of God. This knowledge, the Lord wanted to impart to all his followers.

As we learn this knowledge, it will become evident in the lives we lead. It will, for instance, teach us not to make distinctions between people, but to treat everyone in the same considerate way..

This knowledge will teach us to treat everyone, friends and strangers, people of all races and of every religions and of none, with equal kindness and compassion.

Perhaps, most importantly of all, it will teach us not to be afraid.



“EPHATHA”: Open wide the doors for Christ. Do not be afraid!”

The young student in Poland learned that lesson.

“He has done well”, the people say of Jesus in the Gospel.

We can say the same of Pope St John Paul II: “He has done well”.

Next:

GOSPEL WORDSEARCH

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TYRE SIDON SEA GALILEE
DEAF IMPEDIMENT EARS CROWD
HAND DECAPOLIS DUMB SPOKE

