

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – by Father Dave

At the Annual National Prayer Breakfast on February 2, 1984, Ronald Reagan, the former president of the United States, told the old story of "the little monk," Telemachus, a martyr whose self-sacrificial commitment to Christian ideals opened the blind eyes and deaf ears of the Romans and their fifth century Christian Emperor Honorius. According to the story, this Turkish monk was led by an inner voice to go to Rome in order to stop the cruel and inhuman gladiatorial fights between slaves. He followed the crowds to the Coliseum where two gladiators were fighting. He jumped into the arena and tried to stop them, shouting, "In the name of Christ, hold back!" The gladiators stopped, but the spectators became indignant. A group of them rushed into the arena and beat Telemachus to death. When the crowd saw the brave little monk lying dead in a pool of blood, they fell silent, leaving the stadium, one by one. Three days later, because of Telemachus' heroic sacrifice of his own life, the Emperor decreed an end to the games. In today's Gospel, which describes the miraculous healing of a deaf mute, we are invited to open our ears and eyes, loosen our tongues and pray for the courage of our Christian convictions to become the voice of the voiceless.

Today's Scripture Readings offer us God's invitation to become humble instruments of healing in Jesus' hands by giving voice to the voiceless and caring love to the needy and the marginalized in our society. The readings also invite us to open our ears to hear the word of God and to let our tongues be loosened by the Holy Spirit to convey the Good News of God's love and salvation to others.

The first reading (Is 35:4-7), reminds us that God's eyes are constantly focused on the helpless. God especially cares for *"the frightened, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the mute,"* and He encourages the powerless to *"be strong and fearless."* Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 146) sings of a God Who gives sight to the blind, raises up those who are bowed down and welcomes strangers. That is why, in today's reading from the letter of James, the apostle gives us some basic and challenging principles of social justice. He exhorts Christians to show no partiality based on external appearance and to practice God's "preferential option" for the poor. He warns the faithful against scorning or shaming the poor while showing special consideration to the rich.

Today's Gospel passage describes how Jesus, by healing a deaf man with speech impediment fulfilled Isaiah's Messianic prophecy, *"The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."* The ailments listed by Isaiah are symbolic of our interior illnesses: blindness to the needs of our neighbor, unwillingness to hear God's voice and the inability to speak words of praise and gratitude. Through this miracle story, Mark also reminds us that no one can be a follower of the Lord without reaching out to the helpless ("preferential option for the poor").

We need to help Jesus to heal the deaf and the mute today. How?

In the poem, "The Touch of the Master's Hand," Myra Brooks Welch tells the story of the auctioning of an old, dusty violin. The violin was about to be sold for a mere \$3 when a grey-haired man stepped forward, picked it up, dusted it off, tuned it and began to play. The man played such sweet music that, when he finished, the bidding jumped into the thousands of dollars. What transformed the dusty old violin into a precious instrument? The touch of the Master's hand. The same "touch of the Master's hand" continues to transform our lives today. By God's touch we become His instruments to accomplish the marvelous works described in today's Psalm 146: *to secure justice for the oppressed, give food to the hungry and set the captives free.*

Let us pray for the Conversion of the World
& for Peace.



This week we celebrate Labor Day. The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated in New York City on Tuesday, **September 5,**

1882. Following the deaths of 13 workers during the Pullman Strike in June of 1894, President Grover Cleveland made reconciliation with the labor movement a top political priority, and Labor Day become a federal holiday in 1894.

The Church teaches the value of work not only because it is always something that belongs to the person but also because of its nature as something necessary. Work is needed to **form** and maintain a family, to have a right to property, to contribute to the common good of the human family.

Work is one such essential responsibility which shapes and fulfills human dignity by providing **for the needs of one's self and one's family.** Work belongs to the vocation of every person. ... Human work is the fulfillment of human dignity by engaging in and cooperating with the creative work of God.

Dear God, on this Labor Day, we give You thanks for all those who work in stores and markets, in mines and fields, on ships and planes, in the armed forces, in factories and warehouses, in hospitals and churches, in offices and classrooms. God, we benefit from the labor of so many people, many of whom we never see. Thank You for their good work and faithful service. And thank You for our market economy that provides jobs and benefits to so many people. May our work always glorify You. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION by: Father Rody

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Just few months old in the ministry, a parishioner once asked me 'With my sickness Fr., Do you think God is punishing me...why did God give me this kind of sickness...I have been good to Him and to my fellow ones...I have been helping the church since I have a job...I cannot recall a big sin to deserve this kind of sickness.'

My units in counseling did not give me an outright response to my parishioner...I was dumbfounded. But the first reading is telling us, 'Say to the fearful of heart: **Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God**, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense **he comes to save you.**' (Is. 35, 4)

I did fail because what came first to my mind was 'what can I give to this sick person?' That was wrong move...it should not be the I. The correct one should have been 'what can God give to this sick person?' Isaiah is telling us, 'assure the sick person that there is God, to have faith in this God and this God would save him from the pains of his sickness.' Indeed, the deaf man with speech impediment in the gospel reading was healed...just curious, what could be the feeling of being able to hear sounds on which this man was deprived of? How I wish I was there to listen on how his tongue would speak plainly in describing his experience.

In the end, we remember 'if we can trust our doctor and his prescriptions in addressing our sickness, we should trust more our God-in the first place God will never charge a single penny after gracing us with healthy body again.'