

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 9, 2018 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving and caring God, thank you for gathering us together to share your Word. Help us to humbly welcome the Word you speak to us today. Remove our fears so that we may be free to serve you with our whole heart. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

Facilitator: During the next several weeks, Jesus will teach us several lessons on the nature of true discipleship. His **first lesson** has to do with inclusiveness which is mentioned in the second reading and Gospel. In the first reading, Isaiah brings good news to exiles.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:4-7

The prophet is sent to speak good news to a people in exile who are broken and filled with fear. The prophet tells them that their bad times are coming to an end. God is coming to heal their physical maladies and to heal their land.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 146

This is a Psalm of praise to a God who brings liberation to those who are oppressed.

SECOND READING: James 2:1-5

Social discrimination is strongly and bluntly condemned: "*Brothers and sisters, show no partiality.*" The poorly dressed should not be treated any differently from those with the trappings of wealth. In fact, God would have true disciples develop a special affection or preferential option for the poor, the downcast, the suffering, and all who are treated as unimportant in our world. True disciples will go out of their way to welcome and *include* those whom our society is wont to exclude.

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION: Mark 7: 31-37

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

A participant reads the Gospel then all pause to reflect...

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.

A participant reads the Gospel again then all pause to reflect...

GOSPEL COMMENTARY: Mark 7: 31-37

Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.

Mark sometimes uses geographical locations to make a theological statement. The healing of the deaf and mute man takes place in *Gentile* territory. Mark's point: the Gospel Christ comes to preach and the Kingdom he inaugurates are intended for the Jews as well as for the Gentiles. Jesus teaches his disciples the importance of *including* those considered outsiders in his Kingdom.

The Gospel is the fulfillment of the first reading which speaks about God healing the deaf and the mute. In this story, Jesus is showing his concern and hospitality for someone who is most likely excluded from the community. He offers healing, acceptance, and wholeness to a man with two disabilities. Notice that Jesus physically touches the man.

The deaf and mute man is, in a way, symbolic of the Gentile people. Until that time, they are unable to hear God's message and unable to speak it. But in this Gospel, Jesus changes all that. Unlike their Jewish counterparts, the Gentiles are able to hear the message and proclaim it to others. They prove themselves to be disciples by becoming *hearers* and *doers* of the Word.

The command not to tell anyone is called the "messianic secret." Because most of the people have a wrong understanding of the nature of the Messiah (they expect him to be a military person, a new David), Jesus does not want his messiahship to be broadcast until he has time to explain its true nature, namely, that of a suffering servant. Jesus will conquer, not with military might, but by suffering on the cross.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

Share the next questions in small groups of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.

2. Recall the time you first heard God speak to your heart. How did it affect you and do you still hear?

3. Do you suffer from any form of physical or mental disability? If so, what helps you to deal with it? If you don't suffer from a disability, what one do you fear the most?

4. How has your tongue been loosed or freed to share your faith with others?

5. What is one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday's Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

JOURNALING: *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down*

what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday's Gospel. Suggestions: Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and heart to any form of social discrimination that might exist in your attitude or behavior. Try to remove all forms of snobbery from your life. Pray for all who are blind and deaf.

SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

Share a prayer, however brief on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: *Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you since you have the words of everlasting life. Or: Lord, when I want to grumble help me to remember all the blessings in my life.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

CONCLUDE WITH A PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION:

Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).

Pray especially for all who are blind, deaf, mute.

CONCLUDE WITH A SONG ©