

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 9, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: IS 35:4-7A

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.

Responsorial Psalm: PS 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!

The God of Jacob keeps faith forever, secures
justice for the oppressed, gives food to the
hungry. The LORD sets captives free.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

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.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

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.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

Second Reading: JAS 2:1-5

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?

Gospel: MK 7:31-37

Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by
way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, 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,
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."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

“This is the first thing to get clear in talking about miracles, whatever experiences we may have, we shall not regard them as miraculous if we already hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural. Any event which is claimed as a miracle is, in the last resort, an experience received from the senses; and the senses are not infallible. We can always say we have been the victims of an illusion; if we disbelieve in the supernatural this is what we always shall say.”*

For many of us the miraculous is non-existent in our lives, yet if asked we would profess that we have no doubt that Jesus lives and is at work in the world today. Which is true, that the miraculous is not present in our world, or that it is not recognized in our world? In the biblical accounts of Jesus' life we read of many miraculous healings as well as other miracles. Not everyone in the crowd personally received a miracle, though all observed them, because not everyone needed a miracle. Though everyone does not need a miracle, everyone does need to know that a miracle-worker exists.

Simultaneously we see in the crowd of observers people who saw the miracles, and discounted their existence because they were preoccupied with other concerns, usually illegitimate concerns. These people did not want to believe that a miracle-worker existed, especially one sent from God. When the evidence that something miraculous had taken place they endeavored to attribute it to other causes, so they would try and fabricate an explanation; this person wasn't really lame, he does it by the power of the devil, it's an illusion, etc. Though miracles took place within their midst they did not recognize them. Consequently, the absence of the miraculous from our world may not mean that miracles are non-existent, but simply that they are non-recognizable due to our predisposition toward unbelief.

Like the man in this week's Gospel reading many of us have a similar malady. Though we may not have a physical impediment of speech and hearing, we are tuned out to the spiritual and miraculous realm which exists around us. Though we can see evidence of God's handiwork around us we are deaf to the Spirit's explanation, and possess lips that are silent rather than expressing appreciation and gratitude. Though we pray, and God answers, we are oblivious to the fact that what has transpired comes from him. Subconsciously we attribute the things in our life to our goodness, good science, or to good luck. We have been trained by the world to discount God's influence in the world. However, the world cannot be given all the credit or all the blame for our spiritual malady, since most often we have under-girded the world's influence by practicing ingratitude.

Much of our problem with the presence or absence of the miraculous in the world has to do with our concept of God. What do we really believe he is like? We can readily give the text book, or catechism short form answer, but do we believe it? Do we believe God is omnipotent or impotent? Is he all-powerful or powerless? If he is the latter then we are right in not expecting a miracle or his intervention in the affairs of our lives. If he is the former, and he is, then we do ourselves, and all those around us a disservice by discounting his ability.

If we desire to see and experience the miraculous in our lives we need to appeal to Jesus to open our spiritual senses to recognize the Spirit, and spiritual realities in the midst of our world. As he does this, and he surely will if we ask it of him, we need to cooperate with him by reflecting on what is happening around, and to and through us. A good place to begin is to read the book of Acts in the New Testament, or delve into some of the Old Testament

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books which recount so vividly the awesome power of God. This awareness of the miraculous can also be cultivated through the attitude and practice of thanksgiving. It is in expressing gratitude and thanks to God that we recognize and recall the incidences of our lives where he has been active. It is in expressing gratitude and thanks that we attribute to God, his rightful due. It is in expressing gratitude and thanks that we find the confidence to believe God for even greater miracles in our lives.

* Miracles, by C.S. Lewis.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. How do you respond to Isaiah's prophecy?

Second Reading

2. Define partiality.
3. What is your conviction regarding partiality when you are the one getting the special treatment?

Gospel Reading

4. How does this passage correspond with Isaiah's prediction in the first reading?
5. How have you or someone you know experienced a unique healing touch from Jesus?
6. What areas of hearing and speaking would you like the Lord to touch and heal in your life?
7. How do you feel about the presence or absence of the miraculous in your life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.