

## MARK 7:31-37

Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said 'he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

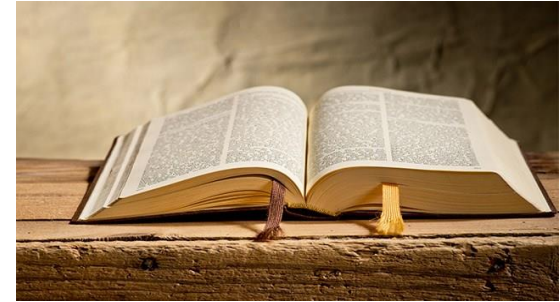
**COMMENTARY: The kingdom of God is about opening our eyes to Christ. This however is an ongoing process. All leaders in Christian communities can easily forget this. The ego often rules. Because we are intelligent with lots of initiative and able to get things done in some aspects, doesn't mean we can do God's work this way. "God's ways are not our ways" and only the open minded, heart surrendered person will be able to work in harmony with the Spirit of God.**

**The basic message then: leaders of parish communities must be rooted in prayer. Their vision and decisions must be presented openly in prayer. This is where discernment enters the scene. What is God doing here? Where is he taking us?**

# Liturgy of The Word

8.9.24

23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



**Praise the Lord, my soul!**

It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever,  
who is just to those who are oppressed.  
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,  
the Lord, who sets prisoners free.

It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind,  
who raises up those who are bowed down.  
It is the Lord who loves the just,  
the Lord, who protects the stranger.

The Lord upholds the widow and orphan  
but thwarts the path of the wicked.  
The Lord will reign for ever,  
Zion's God, from age to age.

## ISAIAH 35:4-7

Say to all faint hearts,  
'Courage! Do not be afraid.  
Look, your God is coming,  
vengeance is coming,  
the retribution of God;  
he is 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 a deer  
and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy;

for water gushes in the desert,  
streams in the wasteland,  
the scorched earth becomes a lake,  
the parched land springs of water.

**COMMENTARY:** The context of this reading is an address to a people who have been exiled from their home land. They are away from all that is familiar and here they are encouraged not to be afraid. Soon they will see what God can do. A hopeless situation will be turned into something beautiful.

It is important in your reflection to dwell on the first two lines that relate to 'fear'. We know this can paralyse us and prevent us from new and exciting experiences.

When we set out on a dream or vision, we might experience fear. When a dream is presented to a community, fear will present itself. It makes its way into our emotions and comes out in cleverly designed arguments. In the end it simply means we are afraid to trust. Believing that God will do something for us is not that widely accepted. A discussion point might focus on how fear affects our ability to dream.

## JAMES 2:1-5

My brothers, do not try to combine faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord, with the making of distinctions between classes of people. Now suppose a man comes into your synagogue, beautifully dressed and with a gold ring on, and at the same time a poor man comes in, in shabby clothes, and you take notice of the well-dressed man, and say, 'Come this way to the best seats'; then you tell the poor man, 'Stand over there' or 'You can sit on the floor by my foot-rest.' Can't you see that you have used two different standards in your mind, and turned yourselves into judges, and corrupt judges at that?

Listen, my dear brothers: it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.

**COMMENTARY:** The trap for the earliest communities was the same as it is for now: the wealthy know how to run the Church! We need to seek out those who appear very ordinary in our congregations. Those not attached to wealth, who live humbly and quietly: Wisdom will lie with such as these.