

HOMILY SUNDAY 23 – B (Homily 03)

“Start Your Healing Journey”

(Isaiah 35:4-7; Psalm 146; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-17)

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A French Canadian logger went to confess a sin for which he claimed there was no forgiveness for. The priest urged him to confess anyway. The logger recounted how he was logging with an unbeliever who fell in the water. He grabbed him by the hair and asked him if he believed in the Lord Jesus and the pope. When the unbeliever answered “no”, the logger held him under the cold water. Pulling him up by the hair, he asked him a second time if he believed in the Lord Jesus, the Pope and the Church. When he answered “no” again, the logger held him under the water again then pulled him up. When he asked him for the third and last time if he believed in the Lord, Jesus, the Pope, the Church and the seven sacraments, the man replied “yes.” “Then Father,” the logger said, “I drowned him before he loses the faith.”

Genuine faith expresses itself in unconditional love.

In the first reading today, we see the prophet Isaiah stirring up the faith of the people of his day in a God who will come; who will come with vengeance and recompense. The signs of the coming of this God, this Messiah, will be miracles of all kinds – especially healing of the blind and mute and deaf and lame. There will be a great renewal of life for the people in all its aspects.

If anyone is looking for a fulfillment of that prophecy of Isaiah, they need look no further than today’s Gospel, where Jesus heals a man who is deaf and mute. The man who could not hear, and who could not communicate, was set free to do both those basic human functions. For that man, there was a new creation in Jesus Christ.

The response to these miracles is important. The people surrounding the deaf and mute man were astounded beyond all measure. We know that they would have readily voted for Jesus as their king with the hope of dispelling the Roman occupiers. That is why Jesus forbids them to tell anyone, the famous Markan secret. Jesus is much more than a miracle worker – he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Lord and Saviour, redeemer of humanity. The miracles are only a sign of who he really was, and until he

could be recognized as such, after the Resurrection, he admonished the people to be silent about his prowess.

The true meaning of Jesus' miracles, and the proper response, is revealed by St. James in the second reading. He questions his hearer's faith in Jesus Christ – in his words, do they really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. James immediately links the glory of the miracles to justice in the daily lives and the worship of the early Church. They are to treat everyone, rich or poor, with the same dignity, respect, caring and honour. In other words, the coming of Jesus turns upside-down the usual hierarchy of valuing human being and human acting, with the poor and the downcast being treated equally to the rich and famous. This is what it means to believe in and to follow Jesus Christ. There is no glory without the cross, the challenge to see Christ in especially the poor, the oppressed and the downtrodden.

Jean Vanier, son of the former governor-general of Canada and founder of L'Arche, has written a book entitled *Becoming Human*. In that book he writes eloquently how he discovered new depths of meaning and purpose in his life by living with the mentally challenged. That experience challenged his faith and helped it to grow. Here is how he puts it:

*I believed in love but for me, love meant generosity, doing good for others. At that time, I did not realize that through our love we can help others to discover their own intrinsic value; we can reveal to them their beauty and their uniqueness. Gradually, through l'Arche, I began to see the value of the communion of hearts and of a love that empowers, that helps others to stand up; a love that shows itself in humility and in trust.*

The l'Arche communities have actually worked miracles in the lives of some of their members. They have done so through an unconditional love and acceptance of the mentally challenged as they are. Some of them were even considered mentally insane, and they have found new life and love through the l'Arche community. The l'Arche communities shine out as a bright light of genuine faith and love in our society that has as its false gods, possessions, prestige and power.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is one way that Jesus uses to love us, to remain with us, to continue to transform us today. It is an act of faith that expresses his unconditional love for us.

May our celebration today of this Eucharist empower us to express our faith in Jesus through unconditional compassionate love of all others, especially the weakest and the wounded of our world.