

## Commentary on the Readings for Sunday, Sept. 5, 2021

### The 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

A Couple of Sundays back, the theme of the readings was “God provides for His people.” This Sunday, the readings are closely related to that thought. The difference is that in this Sunday’s readings, God in Jesus gets personally involved in the health and welfare of His people. What we should see in this is a variation of the same theme, such as *God wants His people to be happy and He will lead us to that happiness if we let Him*. See how this works in the following readings.

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah (35:4-7a)*. Here God speaks to His people through the prophet near the end of the Babylonian Exile (circa 539 B.C.). The people are fearful of returning to a land that many of them never knew, and of what they might find there. So God tells them they need not fear. If they follow His instructions and remain faithful, they will be happy in the Promised Land again.

The *Responsorial Psalm is (146:7-10)*. In this passage, the psalmist is praising God for His faithfulness and benevolence. He enumerates the many things that God has done for His people and how they should respond. Here the emphasis is on the restoration of the land of Israel and its people. We should consider this psalm as a hymn of praise for the infinite blessings of God through Jesus Christ. For without Christ’s life, death and resurrection, we would have no promised land (heaven) to go to.

The **Second Reading** is from the *Letter of St. James (2:1-5)*. In his one and only letter, St. James tells us that God shows no partiality and neither should we. God seeks to bring everyone into His kingdom, but they must want to come. He will not force them. It will be interesting for us to find out, when we get to heaven, who will be there and who won’t, and why.

The **Gospel Reading** is from *Mark (7:31-37)*. In this story, Jesus goes a long way to help the poor and needy. The Decapolis (or “ten cities”) was far from Jerusalem in what is now the northern part of Syria. It was an impoverished area, mostly forgotten by the wealthy and people of importance, but Jesus was on a mission and it included preaching to all of the children of Israel. This little bit of attention to these people made them remark, *“He has done all this well.”*

In the Old Testament, God lead His people through the efforts of the patriarchs and the prophets. In the New Testament, He works directly through His Son, Jesus Christ, but the intent is the same – to make His people happy by taking care their needs, both physical and spiritual. For example, when Jesus commands the deaf man’s ears *“be open”* He is commanding not only the physical ears, but the whole being of the man; most importantly his spiritual ears.

This week’s readings challenge us to reflect on our own conduct when we are at Mass or reading scripture for devotions or study. Do we really open our mind and heart and let the scriptures speak to us? Or do we let the words go in one ear and out the other? Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

**MFB**