September 09, 2018
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Knowing, and Proclaiming, God and Our Faith”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1  Isaiah 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.

Reading 2  James 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  Mark 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.”

HOMILY

The other evening, my wife, Barb, and I were in Wegmans and this middle-aged fellow walked by us. Barb noticed his T-shirt and said to me, “That was nice, his shirt read, ‘I Love My Wife.’” I quickly turned around and caught just a glimpse. I noticed those words in big, bold letters, but also some fine print around it and commented back to her that I thought there were other words on there also. Barb thought that the words she saw were nice, regardless. You know the Holy Spirit may be trying to tell you something when certain things happen, especially more than once – do you ever get that feeling? Leaving my day job late on Friday, quite late, in fact, because there were only a few other cars in the parking lot, I noticed one of them parked near me with a bumper sticker with those same large, bold words on it, “I Love My Wife.” I had to get close to it to actually read the fine print, “I LOVE it when MY WIFE says go fishing!” … with a small fishing pole next to it. … When I mentioned this to Barb that evening, she was just a little disappointed, so I also said that I love her even when she doesn’t tell me to go fishing.
The words on that T-shirt and bumper sticker were innocent and playful enough, but it was easy to get misled. We can be misled in many ways, can’t we. Most of us know that the fine print can put a completely different spin on what might seem to be a bargain or something that appears to be “too good to be true.” Take a close look at the fine print under one of those 0% finance rate credit card offers that seem to come in the mail every week or so. Try missing one of those scheduled card payments and see what happens to that 0% rate. … How about the disclaimer you agree to when you want to download a free or bargain app for your smartphone – seriously, who has the time to read through every line of that disclaimer, yet how much personal information is truly being collected and sent elsewhere by your use of that bargain app. Misleading? Some would think so.

The whole matter can get even cloudier, and still be quite legitimate. A few months back, several teens were on a mission trip to Haiti sponsored by their diocese. While they were there, the country experienced rioting, and travel on the highways around the airport was heavily monitored by groups of rioters, for extortion purposes. News coverage during the rioting seemed quite sparse, but afterwards we did find one station on the net that had a fair amount of pictures and video footage of the event. At least, that’s what we assumed. We chatted with some friends on the matter, and they questioned whether the information that we saw was actually from that incident. They said that it was common practice in the news industry to purchase information from news sources on “similar” incidents in the past, maybe from that country, maybe elsewhere, to add more “punch,” more realism, to stories, especially if there isn’t a lot of info available. … And we won’t even talk about fake news, with its share of made-up stories and all, on both sides of the political aisle. People can deliberately lie to advance their cause.

Even our faith and morals can be challenged by what we read, and see. Taken out of context, or misinterpreted, certain verses of the Bible have been used by some religious leaders and/or denominations to claim that Jesus was St. Michael the Archangel, or that certain ethnic backgrounds are inferior to others, or even to defend the funding of abortions against the religious objections of Christian organizations.

We do live in a topsy-turvy world, and we can be easily confused, easily led astray by the multitude of differing and misleading voices around us. Then again, we might hear and interpret things differently than others might. Maybe we hear only what we want to hear, and tune out what we don’t want to hear. And once we’ve decided about something, well, you may have heard the expression, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, I’ve already made up my mind.” How often have we felt that way?

But Jesus’ message of love, of hope, of everlasting life, is very clear. It’s there, for us, if we ask. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus was in the district of the Decapolis, or Ten Towns, which was primarily inhabited by Gentiles. Mark records Jesus passing through the area a few chapters earlier when He cured the man with the demon. The people had heard of Jesus through that event and others and evidently at least some had faith in Him, enough faith that they brought to Him a deaf man who had a speech impediment, enough faith that they begged Him to lay His hand on the man, enough faith that they believed He would cure the man. Maybe they were relatives or close friends of the man, because they seemed to truly care for him and wanted him cured. After the healing, the man and those who brought him were so excited that they spread the news to others about the healing – Mark tells us THEY PROCLAIMED IT to others!

What keeps us from being more personally excited about our faith, from being more personally excited about our God, from wanting to spread the good news about both to those around us? The physical healing of the deaf man was a miracle, and it led to an increase of faith among the people in the area. We all have some physical limitations, weaknesses, deficiencies, shortcomings, and we all have
spiritual ones, spiritual weaknesses that hold us back from knowing Jesus even more, spiritual weaknesses that tend to keep us confused with the multitude of differing, and misleading, voices around us. We have spiritual weaknesses that blind us from seeing what God wants us to see, that deafen us from hearing what God wants us to hear, that impede us from saying what God wants us to say. Jesus knows what is best for each and every one of us, He knows what will bring us peace, true, inner peace, and He wants that for us, for each of us. His prayer, His groaning to heaven, to “be opened,” invites us to be opened … invites us to open our hearts, our minds, our eyes, our ears, our voices to His Word, to His love, to His direction, to Him being a more important part of our lives. Jesus personally invites us to tune into Him and turn to Him and away from the confusing and misleading voices.

Likewise, we may be aware of relatives and close friends who also have spiritual weaknesses, and we are encouraged to invite them to know Jesus better, to bring them to Jesus so that they too can be cured. We are encouraged to be like those earlier evangelists who were so excited after the healing of the deaf man that they proclaimed it to others.

There are numerous ways where you, me, all of us can get to know Jesus, get to know our faith, better. Some opportunities to learn more about the Good News that Jesus brings us include:

- Set aside prayer time each morning, and stay with it, no matter how busy the day looks to be. Start simple, and grow into it. Make a commitment to do this and I guarantee your life will change, for the better.
- Discovering Christ has been a tremendous success in our parish – the next series of sessions begins in just a few weeks.
- Sit with Jesus at Eucharistic Adoration for an hour a week. Check the updated listing of some open hours in an upcoming bulletin, or just come any time, 24/7, and join other St Louis parishioners at the chapel at St John of Rochester, just a few miles down the road.
- Spreading the Good News of Jesus and our faith doesn’t need to take a lot of energy or time. Light a spark with a relative or friend so that they might get to know Jesus better and then pray that the Holy Spirit increases that flame within them.
- Listen to a faith-filled Lighthouse CD from the foyer; pass one on to someone else.
- Consider joining one of the parish Bible Study groups, and bring along someone with you.
- Read the Catechism to lessen the confusion about what the Church actually teaches.

Don’t be misled. Get to know God, get to know our faith, then celebrate both! Be excited about our faith, our God, proclaim to all around, as those earlier evangelists did, because “He has done all things well.”

Maybe our T-shirts could read, “I LOVE MY GOD, MY FAITH, MY FAMILY, MY NEIGHBOR.” No fine print needed.