



## Homily Notes

Sept 6, 2015: XXIII Sunday of the Year

Is 35: 4-7; Jas 2: 1-5; Mk 7: 31-37

### **He has done everything fine**

We are very grateful to God, because with our eyes, we are able to see the world around us, with our ears, we can hear the sounds around us and we can walk because of our strong feet. But imagine, if we are dumb or deaf or blind or paralyzed, how would we feel? We are very thankful to God, because He has done everything fine for us (Mk. 7:37).

Today all the three readings focus on God who revealed himself in Jesus as God of the weak and the oppressed. Prior to Jesus, many prophets had come into the world. Through them, miraculous wonders were seen. But, some Messianic signs were being reserved to Jesus. These signs are, "The blind can see, the deaf can hear, the mute can speak, and the lame can walk" (Is. 35: 5, 6). By healing the deaf and dumb man, Jesus fulfills the Messianic signs that Isaiah says in the first reading.

The story of the deaf and dumb gives us two insights of today's gospel. First, the question arises: Why should Jesus heal the deaf and dumb man? The answer is, the deaf people are often embarrassed by their situation. They can't understand the simplest questions that we ask them. They always feel embarrassed and out of place. They feel that they are not part of any community. That's why they stand outside or sit at our feet (Jas 2:3). Being the Messiah, Jesus shows real compassion for him. Besides pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the healing of the man points to Jesus as a compassionate person. For the first time in his life, the deaf and dumb man feels that he is also a part of the human community.

Second, why did Jesus take the deaf man away from the crowd to heal him? He could have healed him in front of the people, who are still not able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. I think that in his healing story, Mark is

probably saying something to us. That is, in order to be healed of one's deafness and dumbness, one needs distance from the noisy crowd and comes closer to the heart of Jesus (Mk. 7:33).

The healing of the deaf-mute demands two values from us. The first value is, as Jesus is compassionate towards the needy, we too need to grow with love and compassion. The second value is, our Lord Jesus asks us for a change of heart towards the oppressed and the weak. Are we open to God's request?

**-Gnanam J.**

Sept 13, 2015: XXIV Sunday

Is 50:5-9a; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35

### **In Search of Christian Identity**

Today's Gospel of Mark chapter 8 verses 27-35 invites us to ponder over the theme 'in search of Christian identity'. Jesus encounters his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, Peter is declaring Jesus as messiah and Jesus is teaching about his passion, death and resurrection. The gospel scene is coming in the exact middle part of Markan gospel, which itself shows the divine author wants to emphasize one of the most important points of his objectives of gospel writing. According to Bible scholars this is the passage, including this particular scene and the transfiguration (chap 9), which contains the theophany or revelation of God. But in the beginning of Mark gospel chapter 1: 1 we read 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God'. Here in the first chapter itself St. Mark emphasizes that the revelation of God is in Jesus Christ, as the son of God. Then the question arises why this passage of divine revelation of Jesus acquires so much importance in Markan gospel? Because if we read the Markan gospel as a spiritual journey, we will be in search of a divine revelation, that is fulfilled in Jesus which is narrated in this scene and the coming passages. That is Jesus is the revelation of God, the fulfillment of the messianic expectation of Jewish people, He is not a royal, imperial powerful king, but a suffering messiah according to the words of Isaiah.

Further, we can make some reflections on the basis of this bible passage. 1. In the context of religious plurality, the question Jesus asked 'who do people say that I am?' and 'who do you say that I am?' have specific significance. People may have different opinions regarding Jesus Christ as prophet, avatar, and guru ...etc., but as a Christian we should have a conviction about Jesus as the Messiah, a universal Savoir, through him all universe will be saved. 2. In the realm of personal spirituality, these questions play a major role to find our

personal basis on which we rely our life as Christians. “Who do you say that I am?” The answer of this question determines our Christian identity. Why are we Christians? Why do we keep Christian morality? Why do we keep an attitude against injustice, corruption and violence? Why are we doing many acts of charity? All these fundamental existential questions are founded upon our response to this inevitable question, ‘who do you say that I am?’ **-Bro. Joseph Pallattil**

September 20, 2015: XXV Sunday in Ordinary Times

Wisdom 2:2,17-20, Jas 3:16-4:3, Mk 9:30-37

### **Be truly wise and make the right choice**

Every day in our life we find ourselves at cross roads and have to choose between two ways: the way most people seem to follow and the way along which few people seem to walk. The first reading of today shows a group of renegade Jews threatening the life of a faithful one: “Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man...condemn him to a shameful death....” Wis 12:20 on listening to these words, we seem to be listening to the Jewish leaders mocking Jesus nailed to the cross: “He saved others; he cannot save himself....” (Mt 27, 42).

The faithful Jew about whom the book of Wisdom speaks was faced with a choice just as we all are, a choice between “the pagan way” which tells us that there is only one life, i.e. this earthly life and “the way of God” which tells us that this life is a preparation for the next. The faithful Jew is a symbol of Jesus, the really innocent and faithful Jew put to death by the Jewish leaders for opposing their sinful way of life.

In the gospel we read that Jesus announcing his passion and death for the second time, again in clear terms but the disciples fail to understand him because they did not want to renounce their dream that Jesus would become a king. Therefore, Jesus consistently teaches them to change their present attitude and to overcome their ambition of becoming great in his kingdom (Mk 9:13).

Against the ambitions of the disciples, Jesus called a child and with much patience once more he teaches a lesson for the disciples that if anyone wanted to be first, he must make himself last. Mk 9:35) it took time for the apostles to learn that hard lesson which ran so counter to their ideas of glorious Messiah. Yet under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they went on learning well. Peter calls himself “servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2Pet 1:1). Paul in his letters calls himself innumerable times “servant of Jesus Christ”, “servant of Gospel”, “your servant” (Rom 1:1; 2Cor 4:5). This is the lesson which takes a whole life time to learn; we must ask the Spirit within us to help us grasp it better.

**-Vikas Jason**

Sept 27, 2015: XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Times  
Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43.45.47-48

### **Need for Metanoia**

The Gospel of today addresses one very relevant topic in today's world which is highly materialistic: "*Jealousy*". It touches the very core of our relationships with one another. We live in a world where everything is measured according to the output. Therefore, everything is quantified. The value of a person is rarely valued. People who have values to contribute to the morally degrading society are considered a threat to the world which is highly consumeristic. We see a similar typical depiction in the Gospel. The disciples of Jesus were unable to see the good in the other. The good that the other portrays is a threat to their popularity. This is where Jesus entered and said; "*anyone who is not against us is for us*". The first reading of today portrays something similar. To this Moses responded; "*Are you jealous on my account? If only all Yahweh's people were prophets, and Yahweh had given them his spirit!*" human beings have no right to limit the working of God. God can work through anybody and anything.

At the end of our earthly pilgrimage, we will not be judged for our popularity but the small little act that we can do for the other which is beautifully portrayed in the judgment scene in *Matthew 25*. The kingdom of God opens to people who are able to read the signs of the time and act accordingly. God is at work everywhere and the mysteries of the divine does not operate within the categories of human. We cannot hide God in our pockets because God is an inexhaustible mystery. God has no favourites but the people who are oppressed and cry to him, He does not abandon. The Spirit of God manifests itself to people who are disposed to the working of the spirit in the here and now.

The second reading of today beautifully portrays the fate of the rich people who hoard what does not belong to them. Such unjust people will be judged without mercy. Disasters will befall them because God is a God of justice. Unfortunately, many consecrated people are also victims to this. There is a need for *Metanoia* to make the Gospel more relevant and effective without which, the church will be a mediocre in the eyes of the world. Let us pray for a true and contrite heart to oust jealousy and hoarding attitude, not only the material possessions but also setting boundaries for the working of God as well.

**-Vekupa Rhakho George**

Oct 4, 2015: XXVII Sunday of the Year

Gn 2: 18-24; Heb 2:9-11; Mk 10:2-16

### Jesus' Teaching on Divorce

On the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of the great Henry Ford, someone asked him what his secret for marital success and happiness was. Ford replied, "Just the same as in the automobile industry, stick to one model." Jesus taught the same 2000 years ago as we read in today's gospel.

"Some Pharisees came [to Jesus], and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (Mark 10:2). What is going on here? Why is it a temptation? Well, to start with, the Pharisee never had any doubts about the dissolubility of marriage. The Old Testament Law took the lawfulness of divorce and remarriage for granted and all the Pharisees accepted that. It says: "Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house ..." (Deuteronomy 24:1).

The only disagreement among the various schools of the Pharisees was: What is the meaning of this "something objectionable" that a husband would find in his wife to justify him divorcing her? The conservative school of Rabbi Shammai said it meant only a case of scandal like adultery. The liberal school of Rabbi Hillel said it meant any case of annoyance, "even if she has burned his supper." And the even more liberal school of Rabbi Aqiba said that the woman did not have to be guilty of anything; that the man simply no longer fancied her was enough reason for divorce. This was a trap because if Jesus took sides with one school of thought, he would antagonize himself to the others.

In reply Jesus went above the law as given in Deuteronomy to the mind of God as revealed in Genesis. He went from the Mosaic law to the divine plan in creation. From the beginning of creation, he said, God ordained husband and wife to live in unity. **"Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate"** (Mark 10:9). Jesus' reply underlines two important points. First point, Jesus treats the woman as a person. Earlier Jewish law treated her as property of the man to be disposed of at will. In fact, here for the first time in Hebrew literature (v. 12) we hear not just of the man divorcing the woman but also of the woman divorcing the man. Jesus treats the woman as a legal person equal to the man. Second point, Jesus is interested in teaching not legal statements but moral principles. They asked him whether divorce was lawful, his reply was that the mind of God is for husband and wife never to separate. They asked him about what was lawful, he told them what was best for them, what they should always strive for. For in Christ **"All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up"** (1 Corinthians 10:23).

With this ideal in mind Jesus reinterprets the Mosaic provision that a man could divorce his wife by giving her a letter of divorce. It was not a permission to divorce. It was rather Moses making allowance for the people's "hardness of heart." This implies that Moses knew the divine ideal for husband and wife and still did not enforce it but rather made room for the shortcomings of his people. In fact, viewed against its cultural background, the provision to divorce with a letter was not to facilitate separation of husband and wife but to protect the unity of marriage.

What form of divorce did the Hebrews practice before Moses gave them the law? It was probably the same "triple express" rule that obtained among their Semitic neighbours whereby a woman was considered divorced if her husband pronounced a divorce formula three times in the presence of witnesses. By oral statement alone a divorce could be concluded in an instant in a fit of anger. By requiring a letter of divorce in a culture where only the temple priests could read and write meant that a divorce process could take months to conclude. This would give the couple time to sleep over it, and friends and family members to mediate and resolve the conflict. The demand for a letter of divorce saved many marriages that would have ended in a hasty divorce in the old "triple express" system.

The Pharisees focussed on the law and overlooked the ideal. So do we. One of the most rigorous laws the missionaries brought to Africa was the ban on polygamy. They applied it strictly even in the case of those who were validly married before the arrival of Christianity. In Europe and America the thorn in the flesh is divorce and remarriage. Neither polygamy nor divorce and remarriage is the ideal. But maybe we should, like Moses, make some room for our own "hardness of heart." Are we any better than the people of Israel of old?

**-Munachi E. Ezeogu CSSP (Web)**

October 11, 2015: XXVIII Sunday of the Year

Wis 7:7-11; Heb 4:12-13; Mk 10:17-27

### **Looking at God**

It is always wise to look ahead, but it is wiser to look further than we can see. though poverty is necessarily a recipe for contented life, wealth cannot be equated with happiness. Hence Jesus tells the rich man in the Gospel Mk10:21 that if he wants to become a perfect Christian on the way to eternal life, he must surrender all his riches to the poor. But we feel sorry for this man, because when it had pleased his father to give him his kingdom, he wanted only a little piece of toast and went away sad. Here is one of the most vivid stories in the gospels. We must note how the man came and how Jesus met him. He came running. He

flung himself at Jesus' feet. There is something amazing in the sight of this rich, young aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth, who was on the way to being an outlaw. "Good teacher!" he began. And straight away Jesus answered back, don't call me good! It looks almost as if Jesus was trying to freeze him and to pour cold water on that young enthusiasm. It is clear that this man came to Jesus in a moment of overflowing emotion. It is also clear that Jesus exercised a personal attraction over him. Jesus did two things that every evangelist and every preacher and every teacher ought to remember. **First**, he said in effect, "**Stop and think!** You are all wrought up and palpitating with emotion! I don't want you swept to me by a moment of emotion. Think calmly what you are doing." Jesus was not freezing the man. He was telling him even at the very outset to count the cost. **Second**, he said in effect, "**You cannot become a Christian by a sentimental passion for me. You must look at God.**" Preaching and teaching always mean the conveying of truth through personality, and thereby lies the greatest danger of the greatest teachers. The danger is that the follower, the scholar, the young person may form a personal attachment to the teacher or the preacher and think that it is an attachment to God. The teacher and preacher must never point to himself. He must always point to God. There is in all true teaching a certain self-obliteration. True, we cannot keep personality and warm personal loyalty out of it altogether, and we would not if we could. But the matter must not stop there. The teacher and the preacher are in the last analysis only finger-posts to God.

Jesus quoted the commandments which were the basis of the decent life. Without hesitation the man said he had kept them all. Note one thing—with one exception they were all negative commandments, and that one exception operated only in the family circle. In effect the man was saying, "I never in my life did anyone any harm." That was perfectly true. But the real question is, "What good have you done?" And the question to this man was even more pointed, "With all your possessions, with your wealth, with all that you could give away, what positive good have you done to others? How much have you gone out of your way to help and comfort and strengthen others as you might have done?" Respectability, on the whole, consists in not doing things; Christianity consists in doing things. So Jesus confronted him with a challenge. In effect he said, "Get out of this moral respectability. Stop looking at goodness as consisting in not doing things. Take yourself and all that you have, and spend everything on others. Then you will find true happiness in time and in eternity." The man could not do it. He had great possessions, which it had never entered his head to give away and when it was suggested to him he could not. True, he had never stolen, and he had never defraud anyone—but neither had he ever been, nor could he compel himself to be, positively and sacrificially generous. It may be respectable never to take away from anyone. It is Christian to give to someone. In reality Jesus was confronting this man with a basic and essential

question—"How much do you want real Christianity? Do you want it enough to give your possessions away?" And the man had to answer in effect, "I want it—but I don't want it as much as all that."

Let us face it. The giving up of anything in any form, is going to hurt, as it hurt St. Paul when he had to give up his entire past to follow Christ and it hurt him so deeply that he groaned: God's word is sharper than two edged sword, (Heb 4:12). But Jesus the wisdom of God, assures us that in return for what we give up, we will be repaid with eternal life namely, an inner peace, deep feeling of fulfilment. Hence if we are really wise, we will "prefer the wisdom of God to separate and throne, for all good things come to us in His company" (Wis 7:8).

**Ravi Joseph. L**

October 18, 2015: XXIV Sunday of the Year

Is 53:10-11; Heb 4:14-16; Mk 10: 35-45

### **Living God's dream**

Alexander Woolcott, one of the most famous alumni of Hamilton College, New York, was asked to give a major address at the college's centennial celebration. Woolcott gave a memorable speech which began with these words: "I send my greetings today to all my fellow alumni of Hamilton College, scattered all over the world. Some of you are successes, and some of you are failures – only God knows which are which!" This is a wonderful reminder to us that in our measurement of success and failure, **"God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways God's ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways, and God's thoughts than our thoughts"** (Isaiah 55:8-9 paraphrased). This is the lesson that the overambitious disciples, James and John, are about to learn in today's gospel story.

If there is one thing we know for sure about predestination it is this: God created everyone for success. God did not create anyone for failure. But what do success and failure mean? For most people, as for James and John, success means to be head of the pack. To succeed means to excel. Success is measured by comparing one's achievements against the achievements of one's "competitors." That is why James and John go to Jesus and ask not that they be granted a place in his kingdom but that they be granted **"to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory"** (Mark 10:37). **"You do not know what you are asking,"** Jesus says to them (v. 38), and then proceeds to teach them a new understanding of success.

For Jesus success means people realizing and fulfilling God's dream for them. Jesus tells us, contrary to popular thinking, that anybody cannot be anything. Before people come into this world, divine providence has already

hatched a dream for each person to live out. We do not come into life to write our own job description, we come with a divine job description in our hands and with the physical and mental traits necessary to get the job done. That is what the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is all about. God needed a singular job to be done, that of being the mother of His incarnate Son, and He created a woman fully prepared and equipped specifically to do the job. No other woman before or after Mary could have become the mother of God out of her own personal effort or ambition. This is why Jesus tells James and John that, **“to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared”** (v. 40).

Does this mean that God has already determined, from the word go, the outcome of our earthly existence? No. God has an intended destination for which He created you and me. This is predestination. But whether you and I attain this destination or not depends on how we cooperate with God’s grace. To say that whatever people are or do in life is what God created them to be and do is determinism. The Bible teaches predestination (God has something in mind for creating you and me) but does not teach determinism (whatever we are or do is what God has predestined for us). God gives us free will to cooperate with divine grace or not. That is why, even though God predestined Mary to be the mother of our Saviour, when the time came for her to accomplish this mission, God sent an angel to seek her cooperation. She is a perfect example of success because she courageously said yes to the word of God detailing to her what Providence has in store for her.

James and John, on the other hand, represent the anyone-could-be-anything mentality characteristic of our times. This way of seeing things encourages unbridled ambition, rivalry and unhealthy competition among people, which we call the rat race. But the trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you are still a rat. The new vision of success that Jesus teaches, on the contrary, encourages mutual cooperation and the contentment of realizing that we can all be successful because God has created every one of us for something different. God has enough dreams to go round, a different dream for everyone, a different success for everyone. Our ambition in life should be to discover and live God’s dream for us. Herein lies our true success. But to vie and struggle with one another over the same dreams – that is failure. -**Munachi E. Ezeogu**  
CSSP (Web)

October 25, 2015: XXX Sunday of the Year

Jer 31: 7-9; Heb 5:1-6; Mk 10:46-52

### **Self-Realisation in Christ**

There is an old African fable about how the duck learnt to swim. Duck and Hen lived together in a house by the seaside. Their food was the rotten fish that the

fishermen threw away. Everyday they saw Heron swimming up and down the sea, catching and eating fresh fish. This made Duck desire so much to have some fresh fish. But Hen said to Duck, “Why do you desire what you can’t have? The Heron is a sea-bird. Her body is light. We are land-birds and land-birds do not swim. If you enter the sea with this your heavy body you will sink like a stone and that will be the end of you.” Duck believed Hen. So they went on eating their rotten fish. But this did not stop Duck’s hunger and inborn desire for fresh fish.

One very hot and humid day, Duck could eat nothing at all because the rotten fish smelled so bad. She just went and sat by herself, quietly looking at the sea. In a moment Heron came sailing by and saw Duck in such a pitiable condition. Heron asked what the matter was and Duck told him everything: how she always longed to swim and eat fresh fish but, unfortunately, the Creator had made her a heavy land-bird. It was then that Heron explained to Duck that sometime in the past, even he himself was not a swimmer, but that he was forced by hunger to jump into the sea and then he discovered he could swim. Heron invited Duck to jump into the sea and give it a trial but Duck was afraid. With more encouragement from Heron, Duck overcame her fears and stepped into the sea. To her surprise Duck saw that she was not sinking; she was floating. With time Duck learnt to swim well and catch and eat as much fresh fish as she wanted.

You see, Duck was not just a land-bird. She was equally a sea-bird. But as long as she believed that she was only a land-bird, she remained on the land and suffered want and privation. So the story is really about how the duck came to discover and realise her God-given identity and potential as a swimmer. It is about how the flower bud blossoms into the beautiful flower that it is destined to be. Similarly the story of Bartimaeus in today’s gospel is about how a nobody begging by the roadside came to realise his God-given dignity as a human being and child of God; how he blossomed.

Mark’s story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus has aroused the curiosity of bible scholars because this is about the only place in the Synoptic Gospels where the name of a person who was healed by Jesus is given. Mark mentions the name not only once but twice: “**Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus,**” first in Aramaic, then in Greek. This very unusual emphasis on the name is a clue that the name is important for the reader to understand the point Mark is trying to make in the story.

In the ancient Semitic world, a name was not just a label to identify a person. A name expressed the personality or destiny of a person. So what does Bartimaeus mean? Literally, it comes from the Aramaic and means “son/person

of defilement (*tame*').” This could, therefore, be a nickname given to him because he was a blind beggar. Popular theology among the Hebrews held blindness to be a punishment from God for sin or defilement (John 9:34). But the Greek version of the name could also be understood as “son/person of honour” (*time*). This would indicate the man’s inner nature and destiny. By giving us the name Bartimaeus with its double meaning, Mark could be telling us that here is a man who is supposed to be a man of honour and dignity (*time*) living in a state of dishonour and shame (*tame*'). What Jesus did for him, therefore, was not simply restoring his physical sight but, over and above that, restoring his God-given human dignity. We can liken it to what the Heron did for the Duck, enlightening and empowering someone to realize their God-given potentials and dignity.

Like Duck by the seaside or like Bartimaeus by the wayside, are we sometimes bored, feeling that there must be more to life than we are getting at the moment? Do we sometimes feel like we are born to be swimmers and yet here we are idly walking and eating rotten fish by the seaside? Do we sometimes feel, like Bartimaeus, that we should be following Jesus in his enthusiastic campaign to save the world and yet we find ourselves all day long doing nothing but the same boring routine of trying to find food? The good news is that Jesus is passing by. He can heal and take away whatever weakness or handicap that holds us down. Do not pay heed to friends who, like the Hen, will say that you are daydreaming. Bartimaeus did not heed those who tried to dissuade him. Jesus is here to heal the blindness that has immobilized us, to empower and transform us from passive bystanders to his active and enthusiastic followers in the otherwise boring journey of life.

**-Munachi E. Ezeogu CSSP (Web)**

<p>(Due to lack of space, the regular Book Review Section is regrettably omitted in this issue)</p>
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