

## Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

An elderly gentleman had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He went to the doctor, and the doctor was able to have him fitted for a set of hearing aids that allowed the gentleman to hear 100%. The elderly gentleman went back in a month to the doctor and the doctor said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." The gentleman replied, "Oh, I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to the conversations. I've changed my will three times!"

Dear Friends,

This weekend we remember the Feast of the Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast is very close to my heart. This feast is celebrated in India as our Lady of Good Health. Hundreds of thousands of people, in spite of religious differences gather on this day at this shrine in our state to intercede for good health and prosperity in their families and life. The liturgical readings today gives us an opportunity to reflect on sickness and healing and rich and poor.

All of us human beings face the inevitable experience of sickness either in ourselves or in those close to us. The COVID pandemic has taught us in an emphatic way, that all of us – rich or poor, 'first-world' or 'third world', higher or lower class – can be affected by sickness. Our response to sickness varies according to the wealth we have. Those who are wealthy can fly to any part of the world or can bring in experts from any part of the world to get rid of sickness. Those who are not wealthy take refuge in various shrines to get rid of their sickness.

In the Jewish community (at the time of Jesus), this was not possible. The poor and the sick were told that they cannot approach God. For the Jewish leaders, health and wealth were blessings from God and hence, automatically, sickness and poverty were curses from God. Hence, the sick and the poor were to be shunned like plagues. Some forms of sickness, like leprosy, were the ultimate curse from God. Those who suffer from leprosy were to be banished from the human community.

The first reading from the Book of Isaiah tells us to be strong and not to be afraid. He was preparing them mentally that God would heal all our wounds. God will heal and provide abundant resources even in places where resources are limited.

The second reading brings challenging situations for us. God never shows partiality, but he favors, or in other words, his preference lies with the poor. James asks us to think how we treat our fellow humans.

The Gospel tells that Jesus treats everyone equally. We heard that the man was brought to Jesus. May be he was reluctant to come to Jesus for various reasons. He was respected by Jesus and people who brought him. Jesus accomplished both internal and external restoration by fulfilling Isaiah's word and those of James.

Let us reflect on how we care for people who are ill physically, mentally as well as economically. As this month, being a mental health awareness month, how do we support people who are seeking out mental or physical wellbeing?

How are we doing ourselves in asking God for help in our own lives?

Good prayer this week is for wisdom to be open to see how God continues to heal us in all aspects of physical, spiritual, psychological or emotional challenges that we may be facing, and the grace to accept his mercy, love and healing in our lives.