

HOMILY 23rd SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 4/5, 2021

There was a man who had just moved into a new neighborhood. He was really busy getting settled, and on Sunday morning he thought, "I should go to Mass." So he went on-line and looked for a Catholic Church near him. He found one, and he was running late; but if he left right away, he could probably make it. He was not dressed very well because he had been unpacking boxes, but he decided to go anyway. When he got there, the people there were all very well dressed and he felt a little out of place. He went in anyway and most of the people just ignored him, except periodically someone would look him up and down and give him the "stink eye" if you know what I mean. When he left after Mass he thought: "They were not very welcoming. I am never going back there again." But he thought about it during the week and on Sunday morning he decided to get all dressed up in a designer suit and go to Mass. When he walked in, multiple people welcomed him, asked if he was new in the area, and invited him to join the parish. After Mass, the Pastor noticed him and invited him to come to the rectory for dinner that evening. He accepted. When he got there, there was a group of parishioners there to welcome him. Then they sat down to dinner and started to pass the food. First they passed salad. He took some and put it in his side jacket pocket. He got some funny looks. Next came the mashed potatoes and gravy. He put that in his jacket breast pocket. More funny looks. Next came the chicken and you guessed it, right in his pocket. Finally the pastor said: "What on earth are you doing?" The man replied: "Obviously you did not invite me to dinner; you invited my suit, so I am feeding my suit."

St. James was addressing something similar in the Second Reading today. He is telling the people that they should not be treating the poor different from the rich. That is the obvious message, but I think there is a deeper message. I think St. James is telling us we should not judge one another by superficial appearances. We should not judge people by what we think we know about them. The man in my story was not poor, they just thought he was based upon his appearance. How many of you would have gone back to that parish after what he experienced? We need to get to know people and give them a chance.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus cures the deaf man with the speech impediment. A healing miracle on the surface, but look what Jesus says: "Ephphatha, be opened." Maybe that is the message that Jesus has for each of us today. If we are going to get past the superficial, we need to be open. Most of us can hear, but how many times have you heard someone but were not really listening. "Are you still talking? I disagree with you, so I stopped listening ten minutes ago." Or "I think I know what you are going to say, so I stopped listening." Or "I am formulating my rebuttal

while you finish talking.” Or “I think I know way more about this topic than you do, so I am just not interested.” We really need to listen, not to change the person’s mind, but to really hear what the other person is saying. Most of us can talk, but how often do we have really important conversations? If we are going to overcome the polarities we have in this country, we are going to have to start having some conversations about them. We cannot just agree to disagree. If we are going to have these conversations, we need to first get past the highly emotional reactions we sometimes have, do you know what I am talking about? If you have a strong emotional reaction to a particular topic, maybe the best thing that you can do is really listen, maybe ask a few questions, and then say, “I will have to think about that.” If we really listen to one another, eventually we can get past the emotional response and begin to talk about the issue itself apart from our political party, our politicians, our tribe, and just have a conversation about the issue. Then we will be able to begin to come together, be open.

I came across **A New Serenity Prayer** written by Fr. James Martin, and I would like to share it with you today.

**God, grant me the serenity
to accept the people I cannot change,
which is pretty much everyone,
since I’m clearly not you, God.
At least not the last time I checked.**

**And while you are at it, God,
please give me the courage
to change what I need to change
about myself, which is frankly a lot,
since, once again, I’m not you,
which means I’m not perfect.
It’s better for me to focus on changing myself than to worry about
changing other people, who,
as you’ll no doubt remember me saying,
I can’t change anyway.**

**Finally, give me the wisdom to just shut up
whenever I think that I’m clearly smarter
than everyone else in the room,
that no one knows
what they’re talking about except me,
or that I alone have all the answers.
Basically, God, grant me the wisdom
to remember that I’m not you. Amen.**

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim