

## **HOMILY – 23rd SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – 9 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Be Opened – Ephphatha

When Maximillian Kolbe was in solitary confinement, he was in a tiny cell in darkness, no place to lie down and sleep. The sins of humanity bring confinement, closedness, hemmed in. It is the manifestation of poverty and oppression, to cage in, like battery hens, the powerless, the voiceless. How this contrasts with the greedy and self-centred, who keep the rest of humanity out and proclaim, 'Private', 'Keep out', 'Trespassers will be prosecuted'. We are so blessed in Scotland with the right to roam, hills, glens and Bens.

The message of God, in the First Reading, is rooted in the Israelites freedom from slavery in Egypt, to journey to the Promised Land. That paradigm of space and freedom, with streams and lakes, is synonymous with being set free from the slavery of evil and sin, through the person of Jesus Christ.

In the words of St Bede, "The first hope of salvation for anyone is to desert those with vicious habits and the commotion of the crowds and so humbly bow his head to receive the gift of healing". Real healing in this life is to be set free. The selfish attitudes of humanity bring fear, entrapment, being cut off, rejected, held to ransom for fear of losing a terrible job or upsetting an oppressive dominant companion.

This week, a young man came to me, afraid, he was trapped in fear of losing his job and the threat of rejection by his girlfriend. His employer had no compassion to let him work freely with peace of mind. He did not want to listen to his story. He felt trapped, not knowing who to trust, who to turn to. Ultimately, the need for spiritual help.

In the Gospel today, Jesus comes across a deaf man, trapped in his disability, treated as a sinner being punished by his deafness and not knowing what to do. Jesus is introduced to him, "looked up to Heaven, he sighed". How beautiful is that image. Jesus, sighing in expectant hope, not sorrow, that He can heal this man and set him free from his disability. This sighing could also be Jesus calling on the help of The Father, recognizing a power beyond Himself. This brings me to a beautiful little detail of this Gospel, that could so easily go unnoticed. "And they brought Him a deaf man". Who are these people who bring the deaf man to Jesus? They remain unknown but perhaps that is not important. The important thing is that other people were open and free enough to care for this disabled man. The openness of people to care, as opposed to those whose minds are closed. That do not are or are too afraid to care.

Last week, my big brother, spotted a young man sitting on the parapet of a bridge over the Clyde, in Glasgow. Many cars were driving on, passing by. However, my brother stopped and asked the young man if he was all right. The answer was no and that he was threatening to take his own life. My brother kept him company until the police arrived.

The call of Christ is that we be not so caught up in the selfishness of our own lives, to be blind and deaf to those around us, not just the stranger but even members of our own families. The irony of social media is that we can be so busy looking at the screens on our phones, that we are oblivious to life around us. Materialism feeds spiritual blindness. Instead, as in Ps145 (today), we are reminded that, "It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind, who raises up those who are bowed down".

The consequences of social evil, is to keep the truth, the reality secret, to cover up and deny, to mask what is going on. To have a moral mandate, to teach the truth, we as a church, as a Diocese, as teachers, as parents, doctors, nurses, carers, we must always seek to be accountable, to be open,

The Green work, to betray, is 'Paradidomi', in other words, to be alongside someone in body but secretly, to be someone else in spirit. Like Judas Iscariot, sitting at the Last Supper, pretending to be a faithful Apostle but really closed to the will of Jesus.

Our sacramental and pastoral call, as Christian people, is to look out for each other, not to be 'blind lemmings', going along in a singular selfish way but to be thoughtfully aware of those around us. To be open.

Ephphatha, to the cry of the broken hearted.

God Bless