

### **Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This week I have been listening to our Sunday's readings in the light of the 50<sup>th</sup>. anniversary of my ordination. Our gospel and first reading have the powerful images of eyes being opened and ears being unsealed. Isaiah was able to speak of what would happen when God would come again to the people of Israel. He was speaking to a people who were experiencing the pain of being in exile in Babylon, far from home. But when God comes again "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy."

When we look at the ministry of Jesus, we are able to see abundant signs of all that happening. We have a beautiful example of it in today's gospel. As I look back on fifty years of priestly ministry, I look back in thanks for the way that the ministry of Jesus has continued on in the work that he has been doing through me. I have not seen many lame people leaping like deer; but I believe that the healing hand of Jesus has often been present in what I am called to do.

Henri Nouwen picked up the term "wounded healer" to describe anyone who is called to ministry in the Church. His insight was that unless we recognize our own woundedness and our own need for healing then we cannot be used as effective healers for others. Despite

my limitations God has persevered and continued to use me to do his work. I have come to believe that somehow God only sees the best in us and keeps loving us no matter how many times we mess things up.

I think that I have learnt a few things about being a priest as I have gone along. I remember with a certain amount of horror that when I was first ordained, I thought that I knew everything and could answer any questions that people might put to me. I soon learnt that I did not have the answers and often did not know what the questions were that needed to be asked.

I learnt that I could not be a priest on my own. I needed to work with others and learn from them. I have been blessed in every parish to work alongside good faithful people who have generously used their gifts in the service of others. I hope that those people have felt supported and encouraged by me.

Celebrating the Eucharist with you has been a joy for me right throughout my priestly life. I often have a sense of being carried by the prayer that you are praying with me. How you pray helps me to pray. I love to be able to discover what God might be saying to us in the Scriptures. I think the Scriptures can be compared to a spring that never runs dry. The Scriptures are always

there to nourish us. Music has been very important for me and I thank God that I can sing.

As priests we are often given the privilege of being with people at crucial moments of their lives. To pray with those who are dying is a special blessing. To support those who are grieving and to help celebrate the life of those who have died is something that we priests are graced to do. These are the times when I realise that what I am doing is not my work but God's work in and through me. I get in the way sometimes, but God seems to still find a path through.

Our reading from the Letter of James today reminds us that we do not always get it right in the way that we treat one another. We do not treat everybody with the same respect. But God treats each of us as equals. It is encouraging to hear what James says as applying to you and to me. "It was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him."

To be a priest is to be chosen by God to serve as Jesus served. But as we serve, as poor as we are, we are made rich in faith. You and I share that faith. It is that faith that allows us to know how loved we are. It is that faith

that gives us the power and the energy to continue that healing work of Jesus that we saw in our Gospel today.