

(B23) SUNDAY 23 OF THE YEAR

(SEPTEMBER 5TH, 2021)

Readings: *Isaiah 35: 4 – 7; Ps. 145 (146): 5b – 10; James 2: 1 – 5; Mark 7: 31 – 37.*

After his introductory instruction the author of the *Letter of James* goes on to deal with a number of particular issues – presumably those which were of concern in the congregations for whom he wrote. Our lectionary gives us only a few of them.

As the book consists of only five chapters it would be a good idea to read it all – it will take much less time than the Sunday paper!

Today's five verses are the beginning of James's teaching about the Christian duty of respect for the poor. He starts by condemning the practice of paying more honour to the rich than to the poor. There should be a single standard of judgement for all.

But in the last verse of our reading he goes further and – reflecting the teaching of Jesus – teaches that the poor are in fact worthy of greater honour, because God has chosen them *to be rich in faith and to be heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him*. This thought is like the teaching in the 'Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew, and particularly the 'Sermon on the Plain' in Luke – "*Blessed are you who are poor: yours is the kingdom of God*" (chapter 6 verse 20). The same idea is found in Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians: Those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones God has chosen* (1:28).

James adds the practical point for his audience that it's actually the rich who treat them badly. That leads him back to the basis of his instruction: they must *keep the supreme law of scripture: "You must love your neighbour as yourself."* In his first chapter he has already spoken of this law as "*the law of freedom*" – taking up the Jewish belief that it is by obeying God's commandments that we are set free.

Now – again following the teaching of Jesus – he warns that we shall be judged by the same standards which we have used to judge others: *there will be judgement without mercy for those who have not been merciful themselves, but the merciful need have no fear of judgement.*

(Compare Luke 6: 36 – 38).

Today's collect takes up the themes of "true freedom and an everlasting inheritance".