THE SECOND READING

Partiality for the poor

James wants the Christian community to treat people according to the values of the gospel and not according to the values of their culture. The followers of Christ, therefore, shouldn’t privilege the rich over the poor.

Favoring the rich over the poor is the very opposite of what the gospel requires.

- God’s preference for the poor is a major theme of the Old Testament – and has become an essential part of the Catholic tradition
- Those who are materially poor are better positioned to trust in God because they have little or no money to depend on instead (v.5)
- Jesus’ incarnation, ministry, and death revealed God’s readiness to identify with those in need

Currying favor

By rings and fine clothes James might be referring to members of the Roman aristocracy. If Christians were favoring such powerful people, it meant they were trying to enrich themselves and protect their own interests. Such concern for worldly matters is contrary to the gospel.
**THE GOSPEL READING**

**It’s coming true**

The first reading from Isaiah for this Sunday is part of a prophecy that God will free his people and restore them to the land he promised them. Isaiah spoke these words when the Israelites were being conquered by the Assyrian Empire.

Isaiah said, “then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared...” When Jesus heals the deaf man, people wonder if Isaiah’s prophecy is coming true. On two different occasions later in this Gospel Jesus will heal a blind man (8:22f, 10:42f), showing yet again that he fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy.

**Loudly and clearly**

The deaf man is changed physically. The crowd is changed spiritually. Just as the man is now able to hear and speak clearly, so the crowds that have listened to Jesus now proclaim his deeds.

Jesus tells the people not to speak about what happened. One explanation for this is Jesus simply wants a break from all the attention, but it’s more likely that he doesn’t want to be misunderstood.

Although Jesus fulfills the prophecy that God’s kingdom is coming, he does so in a way that will shock and horrify people: he will be crucified. The crowds think they hear and see Jesus loudly and clearly, but there’s much more that they have to learn about who he is and what he offers.

**Healing techniques**

Jesus begins the healing in a manner that is typical of that era.

- People believed that saliva had healing properties
- Putting one’s fingers into a deaf person’s ears symbolized the deafness that the healer was trying to cure; just as touching the tongue was a sign of freeing the person to speak clearly
- Looking up to heaven was a gesture of appeal for divine aid

However, Jesus also acts differently from a typical healer. He speaks one word of command: be opened. Other healers were likely to rattle off a stream of words as a sort of magical incantation.

Why Jesus groaned, however, is unclear. It might have been part of the ancient healing formula or an expression of anger at the man’s disability.

**PRAYER**

God of compassion,
your Son expelled evil and suffering and brought about your reign.
He calls us to abandon our self-interest and to expand our hearts
so that we are filled with love for everyone, especially those we most want to overlook.
Although we worship Jesus as Lord, sometimes we close our ears to his word.
Work miracles in us,
so that we will listen closely to your Son and act boldly for the well-being of all.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.