

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time: Hear and Proclaim

Today's Gospel presents Jesus healing a man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment. Jesus took him off by himself away from the crowd, put his finger into the man's ears, touched his tongue and looking up to heaven in prayer said, "Ephphathah." Be opened. *Ephphatha* is an Aramaic word, the language of the every day Hebrew person. It was the language that Jesus spoke. He certainly also had a working knowledge of Hebrew, he read from the Hebrew scriptures. As a carpenter's son, and himself sometimes called a carpenter, he may have had a knowledge of the language of trade, Greek. Perhaps, he spoke Greek to Pilate. He probably didn't speak Latin, although we don't know that.

The Aramaic word, *Ephphatha*, became part of the Rite of Baptism from the days of the primitive Church to our own times. When you brought your babies to be baptized, one of the rites after the baptism is the priest touching the baby's ears and mouth and praying, "The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith to the praise and glory of God the Father."

Your ears to receive His Word. May our ears be open to receive the Word of God. May we allow our ears to be open. To do this we have to move away from the crowd. We have to have quiet time. We need to find some way to build quiet time into our lives, even if it is only for fifteen minutes or so. We need to move away from the distractions of life and focus on what the Lord is saying to us. We need to make time to listen.

Now I know that parents with little children have little to no time for themselves to do anything. Or do they? All of us claim that we have no time. Or do we? We have time to watch all sorts of meaningless stuff on TV. We have time for that which we want to make time for. We need to make quiet time with the Lord a priority.

We need to be humble enough to listen. If we are convinced that we have all the answers to life, then we won't have the humility to allow God to lead us. We need to do our best, true, but we need to trust God to do what needs to be done. Most of us here are in some way involved in training children. The children may be our own children, or our grandchildren, or other people's children. Moms and Dads and all the rest of us are all trying our best to be good parents, good role models, I am sure. But we cannot do this all by ourselves. We are raising children for God. We need to stay united to God and to listen to Him, to listen to Him in prayer, and trust God to help us raise our children.

Your mouth to proclaim His faith. We have a deep responsibility to proclaim the faith. Children and others need to hear about the faith from us. In fact, our parents are the first teachers in the ways of the faith, also from the baptismal rite. Most of us learned our prayers from our mothers and fathers. Adults, be they priests, nuns or

educators in faith formation, can provide a great deal of guidance for children, but the fact is that children listen first and closest to what their parents are saying. They also listen to what their parents are doing. At the beginning of this school year, particularly at the beginning of the sacramental programs of Eucharist and Confirmation, the main instruction in the faith is given by the parents with all other adults guiding the children to a deeper understanding of what their Mom and Dads are proclaiming in their homes.

We need to pray for our parents. There is nothing harder to do than to raise a child. There is nothing more rewarding to do than to raise a child. I am convinced that when parents stand before St. Peter at the Gates of Heaven and he asks, "What have you to show for your lives," if they can just point down to their children and say, "I have done everything I could to help them bring their own unique reflection of the Lord to the world," Peter will say, "Step right in."

Jesus healed the deaf man not just as a sign of the coming of the Messiah, as it certainly is, but as a sign of the love that God has for each of us. He heals us. The healing is sometimes physical, sometimes psychological, but always spiritual.

There are times that we are down on ourselves. We are not happy with ourselves. Do we really have a right to be negative about someone whom the Lord loves? Yes, there are times that we cannot understand why God loves us, but He does. He is God. His love, His mercy, His compassion are beyond our understanding.

He knows each of us better than we know ourselves. He sees how we are trying and how we are disappointed in ourselves when we fail. He sees each of us for whom we are, beneath the bravado, beneath the illusions we create for others and for ourselves. He sees whom we are beneath the material trappings of our lives. He sees beneath what the world has proclaimed as success, as prosperity. For true prosperity is found in the account of the soul, not in a bank account. In today's second reading James tells the early Christians and us that we need to treat each other for whom they are not for what they have. We need to extend to others the dignity that is their God given right.

God sees the goodness of every person. He sees His image and likeness in every person. He also sees how that image can be clouded, hidden behind a door of pain.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we want to be forgiven by God, we need to forgive others. Healing is similar. If we want to be healed by God, we need to extend His healing hands to others. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and heal us as we heal others."

Jesus came and said, "Ephphatha, be opened!" He heals because He loves. He heals because He wants us to be the vehicles of His healing for others.

We are called to hear the Word of God and proclaim his faith.