

**The Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time B –
Ephphatha, Hear and Proclaim
September 8, 2024.**

This Sunday's Gospel (Mark 7:31-37) 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 looked up to heaven in prayer saying, "Ephphatha," that is "Be opened". Ephphatha is an Aramaic word, the Hebrew language that Jesus spoke. The Aramaic word Ephphatha, became part of the Rite of Baptism from the days of the primitive Church to our own times. When I baptized babies as a permanent deacon, one of the rites after the baptism is to touch 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."*** To enable ears to be open to receive His Word, we have to move away from the crowd. We have to be quiet. We need 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. We hear people claim that they have no time. Or do they? They have time to watch all sorts of programs on TV or scroll through the screen on their iPhone, iPad. 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 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 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 listen to Him, to listen to Him in prayer, and trust God to help us raise our children. We all 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 and yet more rewarding 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. We sometimes take for granted our ability to hear and speak, but both gifts are meant for a purpose even greater than human communication. They are our means of listening to God and speaking his word. What we hear and what we say

determine to a great extent what we do and they make us the persons we are. The deaf mute is not an historical figure from the first century Israel. He resembles the whole human race. His plight is ours in so far as we refuse to listen to what God is saying to us and act upon it. 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. Yes, many times we failed to utter a word of encouragement, of hope and thanks, or have kept a discreet silence when we should have spoken the truth. Then there are the problems we have in speaking to our partner or neighbours, because of a long standing row or simply out of jealousy, envy or pride. But our almighty God knows us and continues to love us. He sees each of us for who we are, beneath the bravado, beneath the illusions we create for others and for ourselves. He sees who 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. As Pope Francis said in his September 5, 2021 Angelus: "Let us ask ourselves: how is my capacity to listen going? Do I let myself be touched by people's lives? Do I know how to spend time with those who are close to me in order to listen? This regards all of us, but in a special way also clergies. The clergy must listen to people, not in a rushed way, but listen and see how he can help after having listened. And all of us: first listen, then respond."

In this Sunday's second reading James tells the early Christians and us that we need to treat each other for who 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!" What Jesus is saying to us is that the greatest tragedy of all is not to be born deaf and dumb, but to have ears and fail to hear and have tongues and fail to speak. We are all the deaf and dumb who need to be brought to Jesus for his healing touch, which brings communication where there are silences, companionship where there is loneliness, and encouragement where there is despair. Jesus 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. Let us be the instrument of his healing touch for our family, our friends, our enemies, the strangers we meet. Let us be open listening to God's words and be open to His promptings as to what to say in order to build up his kingdom here on earth.