



Blessed Sacrament Parish
Homily by Father Chris Comerford
September 9, 2018 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I Isaiah 35:4-7

Psalm 146:6-10

Reading II James 2:1-5

Gospel Mark 7:31-37

Homily

In the book of Isaiah today we hear a promise that God makes his people. The people have been in exile. They have gone through great suffering and Isaiah has promised them that things will be made right again. Isaiah mentions many things that will happen when the Messiah comes. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the mute will speak. So we see the fulfillment that Isaiah promised coming through Jesus Christ. And that is good news.

The way that Jesus brings healing to this man is amazing. He was brought to Jesus, he couldn't speak and begged him to lay his hands on him. These were good friends that took him to Jesus. But Jesus wasn't going to use this healing as a way to be showing his purpose. He takes the man away from the crowd and talks to him by himself. Jesus puts his fingers into his ears. Spits onto his fingers and put them on his tongue. Then he calls out this word "Ephphatha" which is Arabic for "be open." It is not often that we see in Scripture the original language being used. But it is important for us to hear this word and to hear this promise. "Be open."

Immediately his ears were open and he could speak. Jesus told him to keep quiet about this healing, but of course the man did not. He wanted to share the good news about what had happened to him. "He made the deaf to speak, he has done all things well." We are thankful Jesus offers this, this opportunity of the healing of the deaf man. But this "Ephphatha," the "Be Open," is more than for this one man. It is a promise to all of us. At our Baptism the priest or deacon places his fingers over our ears and over our mouth so that "The Lord may touch your ears to receive his word and proclaim his faith."

This is a sign that we are to hear the word of God and speak the word of God. So it is good for us to hear this "Ephphatha." Because we often fail and do not pay attention. There is a distinction between hearing and listening. There is a difference. We hear lots of things. We hear voices all around us, all the sounds and we are inundated by noise. We do not always listen. Often parents say that their children do not listen to them. Sometimes the parents do not listen so well either. We need to take that message to heart. We miss things. It is a challenge to listen to the voice of Jesus when he is calling us. We need to focus. There are so many things going on it is easy to miss His voice. It is

not always the loudest. In some cases it is not very loud at all, so we really have to listen close and it is a challenge to be able to do that.

We need to be open to the Good News that Jesus has for us because there are so many messages that we need. We heard St. Paul talk about something we have to be careful of — and that is people when they come to church — some are dressed very nicely and others not so nice. The rich and poor were mixed together and clearly Paul addressed the fact that the rich were given more attention. He said, “Be careful of that. Do not do that, but treat all people with dignity and respect.”

We try, but sometimes it seeps into us and we do it without ever being aware of it, without paying attention to it. So it is good to look at ourselves and ask, “Do I do that? Do I treat people differently based on the way that they look?” We hope we do not do that, especially as a community of faith.

The story that is going around, perhaps you have seen it on the Internet, is about a pastor who was assigned to a new church. He was going to begin on Sunday and he met with the elders and told them in advance what he was going to do. He showed up his first Sunday morning and was dressed as a homeless person. He was in disguise, and asked for change out in the front of the church before the service, and then wandered into church. He sat up in the front and the usher asked him to move to the back. People looked at him, not many people greeted him. The people looked funny at him and didn't want to get too close. It happened.

He sat there during the service and then someone got up and said, “We are going to welcome our new pastor today. They announced his name and everybody clapped. All of a sudden the homeless man got up from the back of the church and walked up the aisle. He looked at the congregation, and then read the Scripture where Jesus challenged those in the Last Judgement. “When I was hungry you gave me food. When I was thirsty you gave me drink. When I was a stranger you welcomed me. And Jesus said, ‘When you did that for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.’ ”

The pastor then saw the people look down and they were ashamed. He dismissed them for that Sunday and walked out. Is the story true? I don't know. But the meaning is. It is something to think about — how do we treat all people? Do we take that message of Jesus to heart? Pay attention to if we are pushing people away, or are we engaging people?

Let's pray to know the ways of the Lord. Let's pray that our hearts, our eyes and our ears will all be open — and we will truly be disciples of Christ and welcoming members of the community and invite all to come to know and love Jesus in a greater way. Let's pray for that strength today.

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