

Dear Friends,

In the gospel this week we hear an interesting word, “EPHPHATHA”. I’m not exactly sure of its pronunciation. I can’t even find the word in my WEBSTER’S II NEW RIVERSIDE UNIVERSITY DICTIONARY, so I can’t even find a pronunciation key. I do know that “EPHPHATHA” means “Be opened” because it says so right in the gospel passage (Mark 7:31-37). In this passage Jesus cured a deaf man with a speech impediment. So “EPHPHATHA” is an important word because it denotes healing. A big part of the man’s miraculous healing was that his ears and his mouth were opened up.

On the surface, it would seem that this is all we know of the man. People brought him to Jesus for healing. In his love for the man, Jesus cured him. End of story, right? But there is more. It is merely conjecture to say that somehow this man must have communicated to the ones who brought him to Jesus that he wanted to be cured. Or maybe, in the compassion and faith of those who brought him to Jesus, *they* wanted him to be cured.

There is, however, another perspective that we must pay attention to, and that is the perspective of St. Mark. He wrote to a Christian community that needed to hear of the saving power of Christ. Mark’s community was, in many ways, suffering in silence. His faith community consisted mostly of gentile converts to Christianity, and they had long suffered the scorn of the Jewish converts to Christianity. Mark’s gospel was written around the year 70 A.D., the year Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed during the Jewish revolt against the Roman Army. Christians were being blamed for the destruction. Christians were no longer allowed to worship with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Mark’s gospel was written in a dark time in the earliest history of the Church. But Mark was saying to the Christians of his community, “Do not be silent about your faith. Be opened to hearing the gospel. Be opened to proclaiming it. EPHPHATHA – that is, be opened.”

In the baptism ceremony, we hear these words in the Rite of Ephphatha, ***“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. Amen.”*** These words are spoken to infants before they can even understand what the words mean. But this prayer is filled with great promise and hope.

We are living in a time right now in which we need to be opened to the opportunities to hear and speak the Gospel in our daily lives. Our Church has been silenced by scandal, it has been silenced by anger and fear, it has been silenced by apathy. We do speak out about the sanctity and the dignity of human life, which is wonderful. But how willing are we to share our faith in the work place? Do we pray at home? Are we willing to read the gospels, pray with them, learn them, and integrate the good news of God’s love into our hearts? “EPHPHATHA – that is, be opened.” This is a wonderful prayer for us all.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel.