

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 5, 2021

Recently I was watching YouTube and came across a video about people who received Cochlear Implant Surgery. This surgery is done for infants born deaf and adults who have lost their hearing. Some of these videos got to me. Seeing people and even little children able to hear for the first time is overwhelming to them and to their families. There are no words to describe their facial expressions. As one that is getting older and is starting to develop some hearing loss, it is good to know that this type of surgery exists when needed. For those of us who hear, we can only imagine what it is like for those who cannot.

This is physical hearing. However, there is something more important, spiritual hearing, that we need to consider today. Do I hear the voice of God? Am I listening to Him? How much time do I spend on God's word? Praying with God's word? The only way to hear the voice of God is through prayer and reading His word. I am afraid that many today in our culture are deaf to God's word. Our world needs a spiritual cochlear implant. We have closed our ears to the word of God, and it is shows in how people act and talk.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is attempting to open our minds and hearts both to what defiles us from within and also defines us as children of God. Listening to Jesus call us to look within ourselves takes a lot of trust. There has to be an openness and willingness to look within.

I remember my days in the seminary when we had to do evaluations: Self, Peer and Faculty Evaluations to compare how you see yourself towards others view of yourself. It was a way for me to look within. The first thing that I noticed was how easily I could list my weakness and vices. I struggled listing my strengths and virtues, having only two sentences of strengths. I struggled to list those gifts and strengths. I had a poor self-image. The next few years I worked on seeing more gifts, strength and virtues while I still dealt with my vices. By the final year of seminary, I did begin to see more of a good balance. It was not easy work, but worth it in the end.

In doing these evaluations and reflections, it helped me to be aware and see more clearly what was going on inside, in my heart. This was the focus of doing such exercise. It wasn't to belittle or be down on myself; it was to take an honest look at myself and see where I needed to grow. Jesus calling us to look inside of ourselves is doing the same, see where we need to grow. When Jesus calls the Scribes and Pharisees to repent and to cleanse the inside more so than the outside, He was calling them into holiness. Jesus is being honest about human nature. Our

inclinations to sin is pointed out by Jesus, and He is inviting us to move beyond our weaknesses.

Again in order for us to do so, we have to be open to God and His words. St. Augustine reminds us in order to hear or see God, we have to increase our self-knowledge so that we can get to know God better. St. Augustine would pray, *“Lord, let me know myself so that I may know you.”* This is a good prayer to pray if we are serious about our relationship with God. St. Augustine grew in his relationship with God enough to ask God to help him see himself through God’s eyes. This is what would be helpful for all of this weekend; Lord help me see myself through your eyes.

Some of what we see we may not like, but Jesus sees us differently. Another good prayer for us is the Ephphatha Prayer we hear about in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus comes across a man who was deaf, with a speech impediment. This man represents the world today. Not only is our world deaf to God’s words, but we must admit we are too at times and in certain areas of our lives. We hear it today in the voices of many, over and over; it’s my way, no one else’s. No one is going to tell me what to do! We must assume this even refers to God.

In a way, we are all deaf to the voice of God. But Jesus does something unique in His healing story today, He takes the deaf mute away from the crowd. Where it becomes a private personal meeting between this deaf mute and Jesus. Maybe the Lord is showing us that it is time for us to get away from the crowd and spend time with Jesus. We must admit it is a very busy world we live in; it is very busy and noisy inside of ourselves. We have to get away from the crowd and allow ourselves to be with Jesus. Allow ourselves to be touched by Jesus. Allow ourselves to hear Jesus.

Jesus does act tenderly toward this man. He touches him and used his own spittle to touch his tongue, and it is a very intimate and personal touch by God. And once touched by God the man hears and speaks. As Jesus prays, He looks up to heaven and prayed Ephphatha, that is “be open”. We can imagine what this man’s facial expression looked like, probably a lot like the YouTube video I watched. Ears be opened, Speech be opened, Heart be opened.

Jesus wants to pray this prayer over each of us today. Ephphatha, Be Open! Where again are we: deaf to God’s voice and will we allow the Lord to touch us to open our hearts to His love? Allow Jesus to pray the prayer within you today as you receive Him in the Eucharist. By allowing Jesus to speak these words over us today, we will find ourselves in a very small percentage of people. Ones whose ears are open to the Lord. One whose hearts are open to the Lord. One who speaks in the name of the Lord.

Jesus is here to open up hearts and minds to God’s presence. Ephphatha, that is, Be Open.