

EPHPHETA BE OPENED

For many years there was a local woman who called the Rectory many times each day. She had some mental issues. She was often afraid. Very afraid. And she heard voices. Voices that no one else could hear. Voices which told her to do different things. She has been dead for many years now but I still pray for her. I spoke with her every day for twenty years.

When we describe a person as “hearing voices” we almost always mean that they hear voices which are not real. Voices that are not there. We all hear voices. Real voices. Every day. We are surrounded by voices. All kinds of voices. Some we listen to. Some we take seriously. Some we dismiss. Some we judge absurd. Others we might even seek out because we think the person has some wisdom or insight into life or some practical experience. We want to listen to them.

Who are the voices in your life that you tend to listen to? In your Family? A Spouse? Friends? Co-workers? Priests? Teachers? Coaches? What about in our American culture? Who do you follow on Facebook? YouTube? Twitter? Instagram? Pinterest? TikTok? Which videos do you watch? Which celebrities do you idolize? Which athletes? Is there a particular political party whose voice you genuinely identify with? Answering these questions could actually prove helpful. You might even learn something about yourself. We all hear voices. Lots of them.

But whose voice do you not hear? Not listen to? Who would you not listen to in a thousand years? Who do you dislike? Discount? Despise? Hold in disdain? Again, is it a certain family member? A Neighbor? Co-worker? Fellow parishioner? Person of another ethnicity? Another race?

One thing we all have in common about these questions is this: “I will be the one who decides. I will decide who I listen to. I will decide who I will not listen to. I will decide the voices I will seek and the voices I will shun. But again, there is a presumption here. The presumption is that I am capable of hearing. Yes. Good question. Which brings us to today’s gospel.

Jesus is in what is known as the Decapolis a mostly Gentile area on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. Some people bring him a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. The man is probably not Jewish nor are those who bring him to Jesus but they are family and friends who care about him and desire a cure for him. They believe the reports they have heard about this Jesus They bring him to Jesus.

Jesus often cures people in front of other people but not this time. This time he takes the man away from the crowd. He puts his hands on either side of his head. He puts his finger in the man’s ears. He touches his tongue and places his spittle on the man’s tongue. But then what does Jesus do? He looks up to heaven. To his Father. He utters a groan, a deep sigh from the depths of his own Holy Spirit and then says: “Ephpheta!” “Be opened.” The whole Trinity is involved And the man’s ears are open and his tongue is loosed. The very first voice the man hears is Jesus. Who is Jesus? God’s Word in human flesh. The very first word he speaks is to Jesus.

This story is more than a story about a man who cannot hear at all. It is also a story about a man who has the ears of his heart opened to the very Word that God is speaking to him. My friends,

is not that the real issue? We hear so many voices. We close ourselves to so many voices. How can we hear the voice of God? Who can speak that word to us because that word is the word that gives life, that word is the word which saves. That word, God's word, is the one word we need to hear among all the others. How can we hear it? This story says that Jesus is the only one who can open our ears to the word of God. Jesus IS that very word. It is Jesus who speaks the word we truly need to hear. "Ephpheta!" "Be opened!"

Now here is a very interesting thing. Do you know that that word is part of every baptism, of every person? There is a moment when the priest or deacon goes to the baby and places his finger on the ear and then on the mouth of the child. "May the Lord soon touch your ears, little one, to hear his word. May the Lord touch your mouth, little one, to speak his truth. To the praise and glory of God. My friends, the touch of Jesus has come upon every priest and deacon in the laying on of hands at their ordination. They are empowered with Christ's own spiritual power. When you were baptized years ago that prayer was prayed over you.

The spiritual power has been given. You are each empowered to be able to hear God's own voice—in your own heart. BUT. You have to believe you can. You have to believe you can and then listen for the voice. That voice. Beyond all the other voices. You have to help each other listen for the voice of Jesus. Only his voice gives life. Only his voice saves. But you can hear it. And you can recognize it.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.