

## **Some people are deaf to the Word of God**

**Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Today's Gospel reading in Mark is about Jesus healing a deaf and mute man. We get to hear one of the most fun words in the Bible, "Ephphatha," which means "be opened." More than just being a fun word, it's also an important word, so much so that we use it in Baptism. Hearing is important. Romans 10, the epistle reading points out that faith actually comes by hearing. With this in mind, consider that this isn't just an account of Jesus healing a physical ailment, but something much more.

Let me try to show you what I mean.

Do any of you have a close friend or family member who just refuses to believe? You absolutely love them to death, but for years you've been unable to see anything like faith growing in their lives. Naturally, since you love them, you want them to be saved. Perhaps, like me, you've developed a threefold approach to evangelism: 1. Patience 2. Reason 3. Force.

First you start off being patient, compassionate, and gentle with your approach. You let them know that Jesus loves them, and that forgiveness is waiting for them. Simple enough, right? You give them the good news... but they don't listen.

Maybe they give you an excuse, they don't believe the Bible can be trusted, or that there is enough evidence. So you respond with a clear and well thought-out, intelligent, rational defense of the Bible... but for every question you answer, they create 10 more questions that stand between them and belief... again, they don't listen.

You love these people, but they've rejected your gentle approach and then they rejected logic and reason. You are terrified for their soul, you can't think of

any way they could be saved if they keep this up! The only thing you can think that is left is brute force. Maybe if you give them some tough love, are stern enough, and confrontational enough, you can shatter their hardened hearts. You can force your way past those barriers they have set up against God, and you can hold up a megaphone right to the side of their head and shout, “God Loves You!” into that stubborn echoing void between their ears! They will have NO CHOICE but to accept the truth of the Gospel!

... So, did it work? Have you tried one or more of those things to give faith to your brother or sister, your father or mother, your friend or co-worker? Have you tried this brilliant three-fold process of making people believe in Jesus? Did it work? Do you have a 100-percent conversion rate with these people you love?

For all your hard work, all your frustration and tears, they didn't believe. Did you do something wrong? Why is it that as hard as you try, they just don't listen? Why don't they hear?

Some people are deaf to the Word of God.

Today's Gospel reading in Mark chapter 7 deals with deafness. It records the account of Jesus performing a miracle to heal a man who cannot use his ears to hear or his mouth to speak. Verse 31 starts like this:

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.<sup>1</sup>*

Why did they need Jesus to heal him? This guy wasn't hearing... so why didn't they just speak compassionately to him? Maybe the reason he wasn't able to hear was because people weren't using gentle enough words with him? Or maybe the people who were talking with him just weren't using clever enough dialogue,

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 7:31-32.

they weren't speaking logically enough with him, and he just needed someone to explain things better? Or maybe they just weren't speaking loud enough? Maybe if the people yelled louder, the guy would hear them....

Those are some pretty stupid sounding questions, right? It's OK, you can say that, yes, those are stupid questions. That's kinda the point!

Someone who is deaf *cannot* magically hear just because you are nice enough in the way you talk with them. They *cannot* hear you because you make a reasonable point, or because you shout loud enough. They are deaf! That means they can't hear, no matter how you speak!

I bet you see where this is going, so let's continue with the story. Verses 33 and following show Jesus' healing work here:

*And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.<sup>2</sup>*

Jesus doesn't walk up to him and start telling him why he should have faith and believe. There is an obstacle in the way, and before faith occurs, this obstacle needs to be removed. Jesus takes him aside, and with a single word, "Ephphatha," he opens the man's ears! Only then does He talk to the man, only after he can hear again.

Your sister, the one who doesn't believe. She can't hear The Word. Somewhere between her sinful nature, the devil and the evil of the world, someone has plugged her ears so tightly that not a whisper gets by.

So who's fault is that? Maybe you think to yourself that it's your own fault. You haven't been praying hard enough, or you haven't had enough faith, or even

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 7:33-35.

you go so far as to accuse God! You say “God, you promised to open ears, why haven’t you opened my sister’s ears?!”

Let’s go back to the text, back to the deaf man. Imagine for a moment that things happened differently. What if everything played out the same, Jesus puts his fingers in the man’s ears, said “Ephphatha,” and the man’s ears were opened, ready for him to receive the Gospel... And then he raises up his own finger and jams them firmly into his own ears!

That’s what’s going on here; it’s not your fault, you are praying for her, you are reading the Bible for her, and it’s not God’s fault, His Word opens ears. She has jammed her own fingers into her ears to ensure that she remains spiritually deaf

Romans 10:14, our epistle reading today, says this:

*“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”<sup>3</sup>*

We know that people need to hear the Word of God to have faith. But how can someone hear the Word of God if they have been made deaf to it? If they have been made spiritually deaf?

*You* cannot cure spiritual deafness. You can’t. I can’t. Nobody can. Only God can.

In that brilliant three-step program to bringing God’s Word to the people at the beginning of the sermon, we’ve left out the most important step of all. In fact without this first step, all of our attempts will be in vain, no matter how effective our methods are.

Before our sister can receive God’s Word, God first has to cure her deafness.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 10:14.

Let's be real, this can be a terrifying thought, because this means we aren't in control of the situation. We can't perform miracles and give hearing to the deaf! That can be scary, because it means that we don't get to decide who hears the Gospel.

At the same time, however, this is also something of great comfort. Sure, we don't get to be the ones to provide spiritual hearing, but God doesn't expect us to, *that's not our job!* We pray to God that *He* opens the ears of our loved ones, but the burden of that work is on *Him* to do it. God knows better than you or me *what* to do, and *how* to do it. God, the maker of the whole universe, the one who sees what is in our hearts before we can even speak it, *that* God is the one who knows best how and when to open the ears of the spiritually deaf!

God is in control. God *will* do the right thing at the right time, and *when* we trust in Him and His supreme wisdom, *then* we know that the whole world is in good hands, better hands than ours.

And *does* He do it? Does God open the ears of the deaf today, just as he did almost 2,000 years ago? Does he speak that same word, "Ephphatha," and command the ears to open?

Oh you bet He does.

A few weeks back we were blessed to be able to witness the baptism of a new saint into the church. The pastor took this child, and in "*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" he baptized her with water, washing away her sins. And just like the Christian Church has done for centuries, just like Jesus spoke to a man, alone, away from the crowds 2,000 years ago, He spoke that word, "Ephphatha," which means "be opened." And just like Jesus, just like our Church has seen over and over and over again, the ears of that infant were opened.

You, who were here, saw a miracle being performed, by God, where spiritual deafness was cured. There, water was poured on the head, faith was

poured through the ears by the Word of God, directly into the heart by the Holy Spirit.

That baby's ears were opened to hear the Gospel, and her tongue was unbound to praise God with every little baby noise she makes!

In that same way, you too, you baptized Christians, your ears are opened, let your mouths rejoice because Jesus has healed you! God still works miracles today, and we can trust that He will continue to say, "Ephphatha," and open the ears of the spiritually deaf.

So every time you see your sister, your mother, your brother, your friend who will not hear the Gospel, love them, and trust God, and pray for healing:

"Dear Lord, you are the great physician, you heal the body and the soul. Thank you for healing our Spiritual Deafness, thank you for giving us faith, please also heal those close to us. Open their ears, forgive their sins, and bring them to be with you one day in salvation. Help us to put our trust in you for all things, and to give the glory to you alone. Almighty Lord, Amen."

**And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Trinity XII (Historic One-year series)

Psalm 146; Isaiah 29:17-24; Romans 10:9-16; Mark 7:31-37

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*Soli Deo Gloria*