

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (8/916/20)

Ephpheta - “be open” - it is a strange thing to say, and an unusual thing for Jesus to say at a healing. He has healed many before, he has made many speak and hear, but in this case he speaks a solemn word of command. Not a command to spirits tormenting the individual (as we see him do elsewhere), but a command to the individual who is being healed. IT is a command that is not meant for this man alone, but also applies to us. So today it is appropriate for us to consider what Jesus means when he commands this man to “be open.”

Jesus preforms miracles of healing for two reasons. First, due to his incomparable mercy, his great love for the afflicted, his tenderness for those who suffer and are in want - he wishes them to be healed. He looks at one who is brought low by the evils of illness and his is wanting all to be whole, wanting all to radiate the brilliance of the creating Father, wanting all to be drawn to the font of healing that comes from God. So he heals, it is at once a human and carnal benefit for the person, but also a display of the love, mercy and tenderness of God. However, Jesus - always the wisdom of God and great teacher - desires to teach us something by the healing. He sometimes wants to teach an example of how we are to treat others who are afflicted, and sometimes wants to use the physical ailment to point to a spiritual ailment that God can heal. This man is suffering from a condition that in his time was quite debilitating. The loss of speech and hearing is one of the most isolating losses of senses - isolates one from the conversation of others. In a time of widespread illiteracy and lack of written texts such as Jesus' time, it stops the learning of the news of the day and hearing of God's word so to meditate upon it. Where the spirit is brought closer to God by both thought and speech in praise of God, this man could not fully do this. Aside from the incomparable love Jesus shows in taking away this man's ailment he commands him what he is to do with these new senses - it is a command for all of us who have not yet lost them, but may be at times quite deaf and dumb.

“Be thou open” - Jesus is speaking of a two way openness that relates to the two senses that he heals. First is an openness of the ears. An openness to hear the voice of God whether this comes in sounds, written material, or the visual example of others. Be thou open to the communication of God in whatever way God communicates. Be thou open to use all senses to see, hear, and feel God in all His present win the world. Be thou open to listening to his

commands - and beyond hearing them only with the ears - be thou open to hear with the ears of your heart. This is a depth of openness that God calls us all to and was known well by many saints. The opening words of the Rule of St. Benedict state: *Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui, et admonitionem pii patris libenter excipe et efficaciter comple,* Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father. Openness of the ear of sound and the ear of the heart, and a cheerful reception of the voice of the master leads us to a faithful obedience to the will of our loving Father.

The second openness relates to the mouth. Often we open our mouth when it should rather be closed. Jesus is not speaking about quantity of speech - which generally is better the briefer it is. He is speaking about an openness to speak the realities of what the voice of God says. In the epistle today St. Paul repeats the core of the faith and indicates how he passed it on to the members of the church of Corinth. We are called to do the same. Be thou open to speak when it is uncomfortable. Be thou open to repeat the precepts of the faith. Be thou open to voice the wisdom of God in a world that is sorely lacking in this wisdom. Be thou open to call others to the true faith, to instruct in the authentic faith, to exercise in speech and in action (which in some cases is a mode of speech) fidelity of God. Through the ways we speak - be it in words, gesture, silent action, the choices we make, the love that we show - we have the opportunity to bring God more deeply into the world and bring others to Christ.

Notice that Jesus first heals the ears then the speech. Let us all first learn to hear with the ears of the heart so that what we produce in terms of communication be that which is in fidelity to the voice of the master. In this way we are filled by reception of the voice of God, and we vocalize the truth and presence of God. This is the path of the child who is grateful for the healing bestowed by the Father - this is the child who does the will of the Father as our Lord so faithfully did.