

One of the great promises of the internet was that it would open up the world to its users.

How could it not?

After all, the internet would in a sense, connect every computer --- and therefore, connect nearly every idea and every person.

Prejudice, mistrust, and hatred would melt away as each person on the planet came into contact with all sorts of people unlike themselves --- people who looked different, lived different, thought different, and prayed different.

No longer would we be isolated from each other and all the ways we are different.

And this opening up to a big and beautiful world could only be a good thing.

Right?

Well, in a sense, we have yet to find out.

The reason, of course, is that for many of us the Internet has become *not a place where we seek out people **different** from ourselves.*

but rather the place where we connect with people just like ourselves --- people who think and have ideas just like ours.

And so ---

instead of providing an opportunity for us to open ourselves up to the incredible world around us ---

the internet has provided an really simple way of retreating into our own small world --- the world of our own way of living, thinking, spending, voting, and even praying.

For many of us, technology has enabled us to simply close ourselves off from so much. It has allowed us to close ourselves off from anything or anyone who challenges us, or makes us uncomfortable.

And no matter what we are thinking or feeling ---

no matter how unhealthy, hurtful, misguided, or maybe even hateful ----

there are people only a click away who will encourage our way of thinking.

To use an analogy --- if our biased thoughts and ideas are like water, sand, and rock -- just an assortment of stuff we bring to the table --- the internet can be the cement that hardens them.

Of course, other ideas aren't the only things we close ourselves off to.

Some of us close ourselves off to new opportunities and new experiences --- choosing to remain in our comfort zones.

Some of us close ourselves off to romantic love --- having been hurt too many times.

Some of us close ourselves off to family members --- choosing instead to carry grudges for years on end.

And some of us even close ourselves off in a physical sense ---

Retreating night after night to the safety and security of our homes with every window and door securely closed and bolted.

It's a big, bad, uncertain world out there.

We better not take any chances.

Do we do the same with God?

“He put his finger into the man’s ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; . . .
. . . and said to him, ‘Eh-fatha!’ --- that is, ‘Be opened!’”

In one sense, our Gospel story today is one more example of Jesus’s compassion while “performing” a miracle to help someone in need.

But in another sense, it is more than that ---

especially in the details provided by Mark ---

the touching of the man’s ears and tongue ---

and that strange word --- Ephphatha! Or be opened!

You might think that this Gospel passage is the only time you have ever heard this word before ---

but it is used at every infant baptism ---

as the priest or deacon touches the baby's ears and mouth asking God to open their ears to hear God's Word, and open their mouth to speak it.

But as with nearly everything we read in Scripture ---

the stories about Jesus aren't simply a remembrance of something he said or did long ago.

They are evidence and signs of Jesus's continued action in our world today.

And so when Jesus says, "Ephphatha!" to the man who is deaf and mute, he's saying that same thing to you and to me.

I guess that shouldn't surprise us.

After all, Jesus did a lot of "opening up" as he ministered to others.

He opened eyes, ears and mouths.

He opened the hearts of people to compassion and mercy and forgiveness.

He opened minds to new ways of thinking and understanding.

And of course, the most important "opening" of all --- the empty tomb with the stone rolled away.

Not even the door of death could remain closed in face of Jesus' love and faithfulness.

One thing for sure ---

however you choose to define faith ---

it is not about being closed off and turned inward.

It is about being open ---

And turned **outward** toward God and others, ready to receive all He has to give us.

So what do we need to be open to?

How about openness to helping others?

The Gospel begins with some people bringing a deaf and dumb man to Jesus and begging him to lay his hand on him.

The action of the people is a sign of goodwill and charity.

Bringing anyone to Jesus is the finest and most precious gift we can give someone.

Let us always be open to helping others.

What about openness to leave the crowd?

Responding to the people's request, Jesus takes the man and leaves the crowd.

The crowd here stands for all the spiritual, moral, even physical roadblocks that constantly surround us.

This man was open to the invitation to leave the crowd, and that was the first step to his healing.

Many of us are still suffering from the overwhelming sway of the crowd with all the noise in the world today from both the social and conventional media.

There is the need for us to be open to allow the Lord to take us away from the crowd so that we can experience that special touch that would transform us into the men and women God desires us to be.

What about openness to the healing touch of the Lord?

If we pay attention to the ritual that accompanied the healing of this man we could see the man's openness to the way that Jesus healed him.

In the story, we learn that our Lord had to put his finger into the man's ears, and spitting he touches his tongue with saliva and says *epphatha*, which means, "be opened."

During this process, the man remains open and accepting.

We need to be open to the healing touch **of the word of God to our ears and His touch in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.**

What about openness to being open?

Openness to being open requires us to listen with great **charity** and speak with **clarity**.

If we pay attention to the healing process in this gospel today, we could see that our Lord opened the ears before the mouth.

The priority that the ears received during the healing tells us about the importance of listening more than talking.

Maybe that is why God gave us two ears and one mouth?

This Openness is probably the hardest thing to learn. I know I'm still trying to learn this.

We are in the season of *ephphatha* as we receive the invitation be open to God who is calling us to leave the crowd and save our souls.

He has set before us an open door that nobody can close.

I guess it all comes down to whether or not we feel the need to change.

If not, then "Ephphatha!" is simply a strange empty word.

But if so ---

if we truly desire to allow God to change us ---

then that strange word means so much more ---

it means the difference between a life we choose for ourselves and a life chosen for us by God.

Which will it be?