

The original language of the New Testament is Greek, which of course was not the language that Jesus would have used as he taught and preached in his native Israel. But occasionally we do see Aramaic words that are left untranslated. The one that is probably most familiar to us is the word for father, Abba, which Jesus uses to address God. And so for some reason the Evangelists felt it necessary, that in their account of Jesus' words and actions it was best to let us hear the word as Jesus would have said it.

Today's Gospel presents us with one of those events. The crowds present to Jesus a man who is deaf and mute. And so in an action that is very physical Jesus heals him. He takes his fingers and puts them in his ears. He takes some spittle and touches his tongue and with a great sigh he says Ephphtha, that is "be opened". Be opened and the man is able to hear and to speak. Obviously a very powerful moment, as the crowds begin to acclaim him; he does everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. So, this expression- Ephphtha is pretty important. But what does it mean to be opened?

A week ago, on August 28, we celebrated the feast day of St. Augustine. One of the most influential Christian thinkers of all time. Augustine was quite a brilliant man and before his conversion he was engaged by the Roman emperor to be the imperial orator, to be the official spokesperson of the imperial palace, to craft words in order to make the emperor and his policies attractive, to make him look good. At this point in history the emperor, who is only a child, with his mother as regent resides, not in Rome, but in Milan. And so, Augustine, comes in to contact with another of the Churches greatest teachers, St. Ambrose. Ambrose and the emperor did not get along and so, as the emperor's enemy, it was Augustine's job to take him down with his words.

There is a very good movie on the life of Augustine in which there is profound scene in which Augustine is exercising his rhetorical skill in order to criticize the bishop Ambrose.

With a captive audience, Augustine mocks the bishop Ambrose, asserting the futility of searching for the truth, of being open to the truth. The emperor and his mother are Arian Christians, the captain of the guard a pagan, I am Manichean, you bishop are Catholic; how do you find the truth with so many paths. To which Ambrose responds, "it is not you who are searching for the truth, the Truth is searching for you."

When we hear the expression "be opened", be opened are we not much like St. Augustine in the imperial court. Look at all the different paths, ways, different personal truths. If we are open to all we really arrive at nothing, the search for truth is futile. But maybe that word Ephphatha, is leading us to a different understanding of openness. Augustine discovered the Truth that was searching for him, heard God call him and was thus baptized by Ambrose.

In the liturgy for baptism there is a part that is called the Ephphatha rite. The priest or deacon goes from child to child touching them on the ears and on the mouth saying, "May the Lord soon touch your ears to hear his word and your mouth to proclaim his faith to praise and glory of God the Father." And so Ephphatha, be opened applies to all of us who have been baptized.

It means an openness to receive, to receive the word, to receive the word of truth. In our baptism Jesus has claimed us for his own, and it up for us to allow the fruit of our baptism to open us up, to allow him who is searching for us to enter. So that our ears will hear His word and our mouths will proclaim his faith to praise and glory of God the Father.