

We have read the Middle Eastern fable Aladdin and the magic lamp. We have told retold this story to our children. It is a fascinating story. Aladdin a poor man is given a magic lamp. At his command, the magic lamp opens the vault filled with treasure and again at his words closes the vault. The gospel of today speaks to us a similar miracle. You just heard an old Aramaic word: “**Ephphatha**.” Meaning, “**be opened**” and was used by Jesus, as a divine command. Be opened to the treasures of God’s word. He was, of course, dealing with a deaf and dumb man who lived in a city named Tyre.

In healing the man who is deaf and mute, Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah in our first reading...**the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed**...(Isa 35:5) After Jesus healed the deaf and dumb man there is a statement by the crowd which is a deliberate reference to Isaiah’s text; they said, “**He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak**.” (Mark 7:37) Throughout the Gospels Jesus fulfills the prophecies of old as he opens the ears of the deaf and restores speech to those with impediments, opens the eyes of the blind, heals the crippled, raises the dead back to life, and **ultimately takes away our sins**.

Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled not only in the healing of that deaf mute. It is a miracle all of us have experienced all of us continue to experience even today. At every baptism there are four signs signifying the new life received during baptism. Pouring the water on the forehead to wash away original sin, clothing the newborn with a white garment signifying purity of life, presenting a lighted candle to keep the light of faith burning till death and lastly, the Ephphatha blessing of the ears and mouth of the child by the priest. This is the prayer of the priest, “**The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father**” At baptism, we accept the dual obligation to “**Come and hear and Go and Tell**” what you heard.

When we were baptized Christ spiritually touched our ears to be open to the word of God and touched our tongue to proclaim the word. The question is: What do we hear and what do we tell others? Present day malady that we experience is **deafness to the Gospels**, deafness to the Christian faith. Our days are crammed with too many words, too much talk. We live in the midst of 24/7 cable television news, days filled with texting, talking, e-mailing, on various communication devices. So much so, we are deaf to the words of Jesus, deaf to the gospels, because the loudness and clutter of this world’s noise has made us deaf. Healing is badly needed. **Jesus says to all of us “Ephphatha”** Open your ears to the gospel.

Many baptized Christians are not very good at either listening or speaking, where God is concerned. Some have even stopped hearing. We feel we know all about our faith and there is nothing more to listen. In CCD class we heard all about the 7 sacraments, the 10 commandments of God, the 6 commandments of the Church, the 7 deadly sins and we now feel there is nothing more to learn. As disciples, we are lifelong learners. Our faith life is an ongoing process. We need to grow day by day in faith. The Bible study we are about

to commence is an opportunity for us to open our ears to understand the word of God.

Ephphatha, open your lips. The letter of St. James describes the sins of the tongue. It's a small member, he says, but like the rudder of ship it can determine the direction of one's life. The same tongue can both curse and bless, heal or kill, bring peace or hatred. This a good moment to address the sins involving a misuse of the gift of speech. We also use this gift of speech to harm other people. Let us open our lips to praise and thank God and our brothers and sisters. Prior to proclaiming the Gospel, the priest prays quietly: "**Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim your Gospel.**" That's a prayer we could all say before attempting to speak about others.

Ephphatha, open your hearts. Let us open our hearts to the cry of the poor and the suffering humanity. Today's special collection is for the suffering people of Haiti. People are suffering and we need to feel their pain. **Be open to what life offers you.** If you are living all closed up and apart from the goodness that surrounds you, you need to be healed. If you are cut off from the grace of God through sin, you need to open up and seek his mercy and receive His healing touch. Let us open up and listen to what God has to say to us and stop feeling defensive or protective.

Let us open up to others around us living in peace, friendship, and mutual sharing, rather than cut off from our family and friends. Today, Christ wants to open our eyes and ears to the evils not only around us but also in ourselves and to the needs of our fellow human beings who need our understanding and respond with Christ's compassion and love. As we leave the Church today, let us:

'Be opened' – to the goodness of other people, the innocence of babies, the gentleness of the old, the beauties of creation, the knowing smile of people in love, the so many gifts we receive from God daily.

'Be opened' to the unspoken cry for friendship of another, to the call of a lonely person living nearby, the call to share what is surplus to me and no longer needed instead of leaving them in my cupboard when I may never use them again.

God Bless You.