

**Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B**  
**September 6, 2009**

**Readings: Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37**

**Ephphatha--Be Opened**

***Ephphatha!—Be opened!***

Be open; have eyes to see and ears to hear. We hear this theme often in the gospels. Being open to the Word of God is very important, but it is only the first step; we must share the knowledge we obtain with others. We hear and then we speak.

In the past weeks I have bragged about my new grandchildren. And one of the greatest things about being a deacon is that I can baptize my own grandchildren; it's a pretty special opportunity. Normally when I baptize babies, I wear a stole with colorful handprints up the front and down the back. My wife made it as an ordination gift ten years ago. The handprints were made using fabric paint and the hands of my parents, my godparents, my children, and my godchildren; all those who were involved in my baptism and those whose baptism I participated in. And I used that stole when I baptized my first two granddaughters five years ago and two years ago. But my wife has made me a new stole and I will use it for the baptism of my grandson later this month and my granddaughter next month. This stole has footprints of the grandchildren I have baptized. I am anxious to wear it.

I bring up the subject of Baptism, not just as an excuse for talking about my grandchildren, but because there is one special prayer that is part of the rite that is derived from this morning's gospel story. It is the Ephphetha Prayer, or simply the Prayer over Ears and Mouth. The minister touches the ears and the mouth of the baby and says: "***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. Amen.***"

At our baptism we are called to hear the word of God, but also to proclaim our Christian faith. We are not supposed to keep it to ourselves. In the gospel, Jesus tells the people not to tell anyone about the miracle that He has performed. It was one of the miracles foretold by Isaiah as a sign of the coming of the Messiah; we heard the passage in our first reading. But, Jesus does not yet want people to know that He is the Messiah. The people, however, are so astonished that they cannot keep what they have seen and heard to themselves. The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. It changed their lives.

We need to reflect on whether we proclaim our Christian faith. And when I say that, I don't mean proclaiming all the rules and facts about our Catholicism. I mean proclaiming that God humbled Himself to become a man, and His name is Jesus. I mean proclaiming that Jesus loves us so much that He willingly died for us so that we can have the opportunity to be in heaven with Him and His Father and their Holy Spirit. I mean proclaiming that Jesus conquered death by rising from the dead so that we too can have new life; that our bodies will be resurrected on the last day. I mean proclaiming our faith, not necessarily by what we say, but by how we live each day. Do our actions match what we say we believe? The rules and facts of our faith are important, but they are a second

step; we must first want to teach others about Christ. Once they know Christ and believe in Him, they will be all too willing to serve Him and obey His commandments and the teachings of His Church. We must be careful not to become like the Pharisees; preaching rules instead of recognizing Christ and leading souls to Him.

Has our knowledge and faith in Christ changed our lives as it did for those who saw Him perform miracles. Have our eyes and ears been opened so that our faith is so strong that we cannot keep it within ourselves. Is our faith burning inside us like the disciples on the road to Emmaus? Sometimes we don't hear God's Word, our ears are not open, because we are too distracted by the busyness of our lives. Sometimes we don't proclaim what we hear, our mouths are shut, because we are too timid; we're more comfortable keeping it to ourselves. But God calls us to do both, to hear and to proclaim.

I ask to reflect on your life and consider how well you are fulfilling your baptismal call mission. I can't come around and touch the ears and lips and each one of you, but I can say the prayer for you. It is my wish for you. ***“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. Amen.”***

**Deacon Joe Hulway**