

Twenty-third Sunday Per Annum (B)
September 6, 2015.

'Ephphatha,' that is 'Be opened.' And immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly (Mk. 6:51).

At the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism for Children this miracle is ritually recalled in what is known as the rite of *Ephphatha*. The celebrant touches the mouth and the ears of the child with his thumb and says, *The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the mute 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 the very beginning of our life of grace we are reminded that the word of God is received for a reason – that it may be proclaimed. The form that this proclamation takes varies; but the purpose of this proclamation is a progressive evangelization of our lives so that we may fully live what we proclaim. In all our efforts to proclaim the word of God whether in the sacred liturgy, in our own prayer with Sacred Scripture or in what is known as *lectio divina*, sacred reading, the desired goal is that the word of Christ may dwell in us (*Col. 3:16*) and that we may be *doers of the word and not just hearers* (*Jas. 1:22*).

Our Lord said to those who believed in Him: *If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free* (*Jn. 8:31-32*). We are here today because we believe in Him and because we wish to continue in His word; that is, we seek to enter evermore deeply into the meaning of the word of God so that in the words of the Psalmist it may be *a lamp for [our] steps and a light for [our] path.* (*Ps. 119:105*). Our instruction in the Gospel is always ongoing and in this sense, we are truly always disciples. We are men and women, young and old constantly seeking to understand the word of the Lord which abides for ever (cf. *1 Pet. 1:25*). This Word is the foundation of our faith and the light of our lives. By entering into a loving dialogue with God's living Word we endeavour to bring this word to bear on the circumstances of our lives.

This journey of faith that began with our Baptism requires of each one of us one thing alone: a heart that allows itself to be shaped by the healing and transforming grace of God. St. Paul says that *faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ* (*Rom. 10:17*). All instruction, including instruction in the faith, presupposes attentiveness, an open mind and heart. As Christians, we seek quite simply to learn Christ so that we may *have the mind of Christ* (*1 Cor. 2:16*) and credibly live Christ. A deliberate study of the Sacred Scriptures, Bible study as it is commonly called is a good way to begin to familiarise oneself with the living word of God. I encourage you to consider joining our Bible study group which this year will be studying the Psalms as the school prayer.

All of us must seek to approach the word of God with reverence; that is, with a sobriety of spirit that recognises that word of God is not like any other word. St. Paul exhorts us: *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom* (*Col. 3:16*). An early Christian saint, Caesarius of Arles (d. 542), said that *one who listens negligently to God's word is just as guilty as one who through carelessness allows Christ's body to fall to the ground.*

Ours is a very noisy world, filled perhaps with too many words. It may be said that our condition is the opposite of that of the man in the Gospel who was brought to Jesus because he was deaf and

had an impediment in his speech. Our lives are filled with many words, many of them empty. In the midst of all this noise and all these words, many people are alienated not only from God but also from others and even from themselves. The words of the Prophet Isaiah seem to describe the alienation that is felt and experienced by many in our noisy world. *My people go into exile for want of knowledge* (5:13). It may very well be that the noise and din of so many words has caused us to turn a deaf ear to the word of God which is *living and active... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart* (Heb. 4:12). Our call to Christian discipleship invites us to enter into a dialogue with the word of God. This Word (*Logos*) contains a logic that can and does give meaning and purpose to our lives – and not our lives alone, for history proves that following Christ is the greatest good for man.

'Ephphatha,' that is 'Be opened.' Let us open our hearts and minds today to the power and wisdom of the Word of God. *There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.* (Pope Benedict XVI). Our weekly, communal celebration of and reflection on the word of God surely enables us to know *the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God* (Rom. 11:33). As our children return to school in the coming week, let us pray for them in a special manner; that in this new academic year through their studies they also will come to know *the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God* (Rom. 11:33).