

Reflection Questions

- How have you encountered Christ working *sacramentally* in your life lately?

- Have you found your home in a loving community?
 - Does this extend to other recovery groups and/or participation in your local church?

- What gets in the way of you hearing the word of God?
 - What practices help you remain tuned in to Him?

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



The amazing grace of God finds its way into our lives in real, tangible ways. Often, God finds a way to transform our interior by using physical action and touch. This may include the presence of fellowship around us—the body of Christ—or the tender touch of an individual we trust. When we receive the sacraments, we rely on actions and sign—pouring of Holy Water, anointing with oil, putting a ring around another’s finger, to name a few—that are outward expressions of an inner grace. Our spiritual growth encompasses our mind, body, and soul.

Jesus was not afraid to get close to people, a reality we may be experiencing in our own relationship with Him. He especially has a heart for the vulnerable. In this coming Sunday’s gospel reading, we hear of Christ restoring hearing to a deaf man:

People brought to [Jesus] a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!"— that is, "Be opened!" — And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Similarly, we are given a chance to be touched, healed, and opened by Christ as we encounter him in our own recovery. Openness is essential to the process. We pray that our eyes, ears, and hearts may be open to the word of God. As we hear the stories of those who reached recovery before us, we may find that the bond of our tongue is loosened and we can finally speak plainly and accurately about our condition.

At first glance, our instinct may be to revolt against the notions of self-discovery, separate but hopeful, and loving detachment. Taking a step back to consider our part in the recovery process opens us to the possibility of change. Hearing how others have done the same reinforces hope in God's word.

For many centuries, when a child or adult was baptized, the baptizer touched the person's tongue and said *Ephphatha*—meaning *be open*, as referenced in this week's gospel reading. This was meant to indicate that the one being baptized has come home to a loving community. Therefore, it is safe for the baptized person to be open to the world, as dangerous and beautiful as the world is, because the person is among friends and is sealed in Christ.

Our recovery starts, and is reinforced, with the same guiding principles and understandings. We rely on an encounter with the Lord in order to change our trajectory. Our spiritual deafness kept us from hearing God's voice clearly. Supported by an understanding fellowship, Christ moves us into a new way of thinking, seeing, imagining, and hearing.

Addiction has a way of closing us and our families off, keeping us caved in on ourselves. Our own misguided voice joins the persistent voices of the culture around us to produce an internal climate of fear, self-centeredness, resentment, and discontentment. We are given a daily reprieve from these symptoms contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition (Big Book, p. 85). Being open to the word of God is vital to this process and helps form our ability to share the Good News with others.