

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time



When we commit to recovery with an open mind and a yearning heart, the grace of God finds its way into our lives in real, tangible ways. Our Lord transforms all aspects of us by using physical actions and touch. This might include the presence of a fellowship around us—the body of Christ—or the tender embrace of an individual we trust.

When we receive the sacraments, we rely on actions and signs—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. As we recover from lust addiction, sexual compulsions, and other unhealthy attachments, our spiritual growth must encompass mind, body, and spirit.

Jesus was not afraid to get close to people—a reality we may be experiencing in our growing relationship with him. He especially has a heart for the vulnerable. In this Sunday’s Gospel Reading, we learn 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 Jesus as we encounter him in our recovery from lust. 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 already active in recovery, we find that the bond of our tongue is loosened and we can finally speak plainly and accurately about our condition.

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 Sunday'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 to change our direction in life. In some cases, we may have had to be brought to Jesus by a few others who were willing to beg him on our behalf. Our spiritual deafness kept us from hearing the word of God clearly. Christ moves us into a new way of thinking, seeing, imagining, and hearing.

Addiction has a way of closing us 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, resentment, self-centeredness, and discontentment. We are given a daily reprieve from these symptoms contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 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.

Reflection Questions

- What gets in the way of you hearing the word of God?
- What practices help your eyes, ears, and hearts remain open to God and the process of recovery?
- What actions, signs, or sacramentals have served as indicators that you are on the right path as you journey through recovery?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Isaiah 35:4-7a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

Second Reading: James 2:1-5

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37