

St Pius & St Anthony 23rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

What a word! **“Ephphatha!”** What a word to remember! Jesus uses it in the gospel today as He performs a miracle! **“Ephphatha!”** I remember being excited as a kid in school, hearing, learning a new word for first time. For example, I remember being so excited when I heard, learned the word ‘Archeopteryx’ in science (Archeopteryx was type of dinosaur bird – known through discovery of its ancient fossils) It was a fun word, ‘Archaeopteryx’, kind of like another ‘platypus’. If the word sounded exotic and unique, that added to knowing its novelty!

So, we hear a unique Jesus word **“Ephphatha!”** today. It is what biblical scholars refer to as (here’s another new word for the day) ‘Aramaisms’. That is, an original Aramaic words that remains in the text untranslated- it stays in Aramaic, regardless of the language its found in, surrounding it (like DeJa’Vu or ‘A la Mode’ **Why might that happen**-If gospel is written in Greek, **then** every word should be Greek right? But, no, not in this case. And especially in Mark’s gospel, we have multiple of these ‘Aramaisms’ – nearly all cases coming right from the lips-spoken words of Jesus Himself, that are kept in their originating language. Again, why? There could be a couple of reasons for it. First, 1) the moment the word is uttered is so dramatic a moment, so intense and high impact, that the exact words are remembered (like when you have a favorite song lyric imprinted upon you at an emotionally loaded time- you will never forget it-it stays with you). Or another reason these words remain in Aramaic, may be because 2) it serves as a lasting testimony to the authenticity of the miracle (*Would a person go to such length to make up a miracle story and then be so detailed as to say, “Oh., we have to keep this word in its original language?”*) the word itself authenticates the account. Or it might even be that these original words are relics, suggesting that Mark’s gospel in the beginning-apostolic days was originally written whole cloth, in Aramaic, not Greek (it’s been suggested that Matthew was too, completely in Hebrew first, before being translated in Greek?), So, Jesus’ actual words would be the last to migrate over into the new language (*like we see today in bibles that highlight only the very words of Jesus in Red Letters– another new phrase- gospel scholars use latin phrase, ‘ipssissima verba’- to describe unique words that Jesus actually said!*) So, we have **“Ephphatha!”** today. There are more examples of this in Mark, like when Jesus raised the little girl from the dead, “Talitha Koum” (Mark 5:41). Or from Jesus on the cross, “Eloi, Eloi, Lema Sabachthani” (Mark 15:34). Or simpler cases when Jesus nicknames James/John, ‘Boanerges’ (Mk 3:17) or His preferred term of endearment for father God, ‘Abba’ (Mk14:36). In them all, that original word stays Aramaic. The moment’s captured in the word, since it made that deep an

impression in memory, but it also serves all the more as a demonstration to the power of Jesus' word AND testifies to its historical truth!

Think of how the German phrase of John F Kennedy is remembered from that 1963 speech in West Berlin at the edge of Communist Iron Curtain- "Ich bin ein Berliner" ('ish been 'I' 'N', Berl-ee-ner) I don't know German, but he was saying "I-we are one of you- we stand with you'!

But let's look now at what is going on with this unique foreign word of Jesus. **'Ephphatha'** Mark knows he needs to translate it, as he adds, it means 'Be opened'. Jesus is healing a deaf and mute man: Open his ears and opening his mouth! Jesus restores two senses for the man (*of course, those two senses are closely related - I can't say what I haven't heard, and my hearing determines whether I mumble it together or how loud I am*). So, the man is doubly disadvantaged, (like Helen Keller herself - three disabilities blind, deaf and mute) until Jesus heals him.

Yet, more impressive to me maybe than the miracle, to me, (even this double head-healing) is the personal touch of Jesus Himself. It should not surprise me, but the gospels always reinforce, how understanding of us, Jesus is. He brings the special touch to everything, kind of like the best event planner in the world who has thought of everything in advance, to make events so unforgettable. Jesus is that good, so personal, in His encounters with everyone. (*Maybe we can have our ears opened to hear and newly talk about this simple reading in a deeper/higher pitch*)

Looking at reading, notice that in 7:33, Jesus 'took him off by himself away from the crowd.' Why is that so important? Keep in mind that the man has not heard a single sound from birth, or at least for a long time – he is living in muffled cave of silence. And to go from hearing nothing to everything could blow a person away – think of the jarring-piercing sound of alarms going off right in your ear- or I recall as a kid, maybe a brother tinkering with your Walkman and turning volume all the way while you weren't using it so that the moment you turned it on - your ears got blasted-a shock wave. And there was a crowd- add to that initial shock of having ears opened to hear anything for the first time, add the noisy commotion of crowd conversations. **Jesus knows that** and so He pulls the man aside to a quiet place to gently bring him into the world of sound. And to help birth this gift of sound for the man, notice how Jesus uses physical touch to help **conduct** the **earliest** sounds the man will hear – Jesus uses vibration to move = massage the man into the world of words. Mark 7:33 says Jesus "put his finger into the man's ears". What? Well such a touch and its location right there on both sides of the man's temple-bones, Jesus' words are going to be **felt** (the vibration of sound conducted through his fingertips to the man - as if He is teaching the man language by phonics-sounds first). The reading goes on to say, "Jesus spitting,

touched the man's tongue" (Now, don't get turned off on the spitting part- yes he is standing right in front of the man, with fingers in ears- he would be right in his face), So word 'spitting' is better interpreted (and not so gross) as 'clearing his throat' as if Jesus is doing a voice warm-up (a Julie Andrews '*do re mi fa so la ti*') And when Mark says Jesus 'touched the man's tongue', Jesus is manually manipulating/shaping the man's tongue to utter sound as soon as the man's own breath will rise up from his diaphragm, to make sound as wind whistles/passes over an edged surface. And continuing with this voice warm-up, Mark says Jesus 'looks up to heaven (he's opening wide his own airway). And then Jesus groans -a deep reverberating sound that will be felt too, saying "Ephphatha" (7:34). Mark translates that: "Be opened"! And the man begins to speak plainly (7:35). How personal a touch! As our physician, what a bedside manner, Jesus always has. Jesus is so compassionate and personal!

And best of all: Jesus can do that for us. Open us to hear new words, or hear words new. His gospel words, words of hope, saving words redeeming words, words that give life. His words to us. We remember him telling us just two weeks ago in Bread of Life discourse, "***The words*** I have spoken to you ***are spirit and life***" (John 6:63) We want to hear those words that 1) bring us to life and 2) fill us with Spirit. We can encounter them in our every reading of scripture, and especially when we step aside from the crowd of noises, and listen to Jesus in our daily prayer time, to hear Him speak to our hearts. He will speak, and we will hear him. Yet we need to make sure we set that time aside every day to listen. He says, "Be opened" ***Ephphata!***