

Be Opened!

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

This Sunday, the Scriptures remind us of the Church's Tradition as expressed in Roman Catholic teaching:

- "Humanity forms but one community . . . all share a common destiny, namely God" (NA 1).
- "[T]he Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion . . ." (NA 5).
- "[O]ther religions . . . attempt . . . to overcome the restlessness of people's hearts by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions" (NA 2).
- "Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings . . . are a resplendent sign . . . that the Kingdom of God is close at hand . . . His preferential love for the sick has not ceased" (CCC 1503).

Isaiah 35:4-7a Isaiah writes to console a people who seem to be closed to the possibility that God can bring about new life and meaning despite current appearances, circumstances, or life situations. Whether to people in exile or to people who are frightened and downtrodden, the prophet speaks for God, encouraging all to be strong. Our God is here, coming with vindication to save us. All those things that keep us enclosed, such as our blindness and deafness to God's actions in our midst, will be opened and loose. The lame and the mute will be restored to wholeness, while even the deserts will flow with life-giving waters.

Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 Psalm 146 is a perfect complement and response to the First Reading. The refrain extols us to praise the Lord with all of our being. Why? Because God keeps faith forever, securing justice and setting captives free. Despite appearances, God can be trusted to forgive wrongs and to remove whatever impediments keep us from establishing right relationships with all. If we are open to God, we will see his power at work in our lives. That power can never be thwarted, no matter how hard the wicked try. Our God is a God of justice, establishing a reign of justice forever.

James 2:1-5 James gives a rich example of how different things are when we live in Christ. If we take on the mind and heart of Christ, we do not treat others based on their appearances but rather on their dignity and worth as fellow human beings.

Seeing with God's eyes enables us to understand that those who appear to be of little use in the eyes of the world are precious in the sight of God. This perspective emboldens James to say the poor will ultimately inherit the kingdom of God, which implies the rich will have great difficulty in that regard. This impartiality extends also to those who might think, act, and believe differently than we do. Are we open to the possibility that God is with them as much as we hope and trust that he is with us? Can we, will we, allow Jesus to be the model of our openness to God in our interactions with others?

Mark 7:31-37 In this passage, Jesus continues his ministry in Galilee. Mark presents Jesus in conflict with the powers of evil, especially when they manifest themselves through sickness or disease. Jesus is not afraid to cross religious and cultural boundaries to bring about the kingdom of God. Jesus crosses over into Gentile territory, the district of the Decapolis, or ten cities, which was primarily Greek in population. People bring him a deaf man with a speech impediment. Taking him aside, Jesus uses a variety of techniques reminiscent of the medical customs of his time to bring about healing. Ultimately Jesus prays to God and utters the word "ephphatha," meaning "be opened." The man is healed, hearing clearly and speaking plainly. All present praise the mighty works of God, despite Jesus' order of silence.

The miracle in this reading from the Gospel can be understood on various levels. Mark often uses miracles as occasions for contrasting what should be with what often is. Following Jesus demands a new way of hearing and speaking that we often find difficult and challenging. Yet, Jesus himself models for us what it means to hear and speak with new ears and tongues.

Jesus manifests openness by being willing to cross over into Gentile territory and not being restricted by his own Jewishness. His ministry is primarily directed toward freeing and opening people, thus enabling them to enter into deeper relationship with God, self, and others. An external physical condition can indicate an internal spiritual disposition. Thus, to be closed in hearing and speaking could easily indicate a lack of spiritual openness. Healing enables in all people the possibility of hearing and discovering God's Word active among us and proclaiming his mighty deeds with power and conviction.

Jesus is the living Word who allows us to hear and speak fully. He continually calls us to "ephphatha," to a constant process of opening us to God, self, and others in a way that brings about community and fullness of life. Baptism calls us to new ways of hearing and speaking. How attuned are you to your baptismal commitment to take on the mind and heart of Jesus? How do you respond when God calls you through Jesus to "ephphatha"?