

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 9, 2018

Three weeks from this Monday the long-awaited audio technical crew will come to Sacred Heart to install the final phase of our new sound system. We are paying over \$20,000 just for the speakers alone so that we can hear the word of God. Ephphatha is the word we hear from Jesus in the gospel today. Be open, that our ears be open and that we can hear.

Maybe you've had the experience of sitting down and trying to have a conversation with someone who cannot hear. You can sense the frustration on the part of the person who cannot hear. Sometimes they pretend that they understand. Many times, they just give up and stay silent. Often times, when people can't hear they are confused with people who have dementia. When all along they are perfectly alert and aware and intelligent but because of their deafness they cannot interact or engage. How painful and lonely that must be.

But the gospel is written for us and the deaf man is you and me. We cannot hear the voice of God because of all of the noise around us. Or because of our unwillingness or laziness in pain attention to the voice of God. I am reading a book entitled, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise* by Cardinal Sarah. He says, "In the midst of the racket and howling of those infernal machines (TV, radio, personal electronic devices) that draw us into functionalism and activism by snatching us away from any transcendent dimension and from any interior life." As another author puts it, "Noise is the music of hell."

What a joy it is to truly listen to the voice of God. Unlike our own words that can't fulfill what they say, God's word is definitive. Let there be light and there was light. Be healed and you are healed. The word of God is soothing and invigorating, charged with hope and joy. It behooves us to habitually create a context in which we can listen to the voice of God.

Sometimes I feel so helpless because I cannot find the words to calm and encourage someone who is in crisis. It is then that I need to listen rather than to speak. As in many other situations in Scripture, Jesus gets very earthy in this matter. Jesus puts his finger into the man's ear and spitting touches his tongue. Jesus touches the tongue of the deaf man with his spit. How gross is that? What is the point? Jesus is literally plugging himself into the deaf man and connecting with him. Listening to God is connecting to God.

Just like the teaching of the Eucharist and the body and blood of Christ, Jesus becomes a very earthy. Of course, the most radical, visceral and earthy expression of God is his crucifixion. Our Lord means what he says. So we need to listen, listen with all our heart and soul. The new sound system isn't going to help us if our heart isn't in it. It takes hard work and dedication, determination

to truly listen. It is so easy to drift off and daydream and enter into a realm of wishful thinking and pious dreaming.

It does seem that our ears are more attuned to God when we are poor. Things get in the way. That is why we hear in the second reading, “Listen, my brothers and sisters. Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

This is God saying to you. Do you hear me now?