

23rd Sunday (B)

6th September 2015

'Ephphatha!'

Is 35: Look, your God is coming ... Ps 145: the Lord is just to those oppressed
James 2: do not try to combine faith in Jesus Christ with the making of distinctions between classes of people
Mk 7: 31–37: cure of the deaf and dumb man

In a number of places in the Gospels, as you have probably noticed, the Gospel-writer, who is writing in Greek, chooses to leave un-translated a word or phrase in Our Lord's original language, Aramaic. Think of Our Lord on the Cross, crying out "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*" Or St Mary Magdalene, on the morning of the Resurrection, crying out to the Risen Jesus, "*Rabbuni!*" On these occasions of great significance, sticking to that original Aramaic phrase seems to have been important to the evangelist, to capture something of the actual emotion of the moment. Here, today, we get another such occasion: Mark, in his writing leaves the phrase, "*Ephphatha!*" — "be opened!" Jesus heals this deaf and dumb man of both of his afflictions, uttering this single direct command. A historical event — Jesus in His native Aramaic, intervening in the life of this poor man.

But we get the impression that this isn't all. It's not

only about one man's being healed, important though that was. It's important also for his life of faith, and that of those around Him. Although Jesus deliberately performed this miracle to one side, in private, and asked that it wasn't talked about, yet it gets mentioned everywhere. Jesus is seen to be acting as they long thought the Messiah would act — texts such as our first reading from Isaiah suggest this: "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed." The Messiah would bring healing in His wake ... and He does. It's convincing for many of those who experience it — they come to believe in Him.

We have retained this Aramaic word in our Baptism Rite for children, when, after the Baptism itself, we have the *Ephphatha* Rite, the 'Prayer over the Ears and Mouth,' As the priest touches the ears and the mouth of the little child, he says: "*The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May He soon touch your ears to receive His Word, and your mouth to proclaim His Faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father.*" It's clear that the Church sees in this prayer the connection with growing up to learn

about the faith, to have one's heart opened to the Word of God, and then, as they grow up more, to be prepared to speak of the faith, to live it and profess it! "Be opened!" says Jesus. Don't be closed to the Word of God; don't be dead to the Gospel. Don't be as someone deaf to the appeal of God in your life; don't be as someone mute, who daren't or won't speak of things of faith!

This *Ephphatha* prayer remains something entirely relevant throughout our Christian lives. Are we going to have our ears shut, and lips closed, or are we going to "be opened"? In order to be Christians, alive and well, we have to "be opened"! We can't profess to be Christians and yet be deaf and dumb regarding Christ. So we must ask ourselves, are our ears opened? Are we listening to Christ, in prayer and in His holy Word? Have we listened today to the Gospel? Have we heard Our Lord's command to "be opened"? Have we taken it to heart? And are we opened up to Him, to His longing and desire to be in our heart and mind? And, then, have we opened our mouths in His honour? Have we spoken of Him, defended Him,

acted in His ways? Are we professing our faith, daily, by what we say and do? Or are we living to all intents and purposes as if we weren't really Christians at all?

"The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May He soon touch your ears to receive His Word, and your mouth to proclaim His Faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father." We have to ask ourselves if that prayer, uttered when we were baptized, has fallen on deaf ears; have we totally ignored it, or have we done our very best to co-operate with all the opportunities God has given us for listening to Him, and speaking for Him? That word, *Ephphatha*, cries out from the Gospel today, boldly and loudly, so that we hear it and take note. Jesus is appealing to you to hear that command of His: "Be opened!" — "Please be open to Me," He says, "please listen to Me, and speak for Me." Jesus needs us, His Church, to be His ears and His lips in the world, to hear of the needs, and to speak the words of faith, consolation, and Gospel. Be opened! Be open to Him in Mass today! Listen quietly to any way that He prompts you to speak His Word this week.