

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time - September 5, 2021

Deacon Jim Olshefski

I have the most secure laptop in the world. Yes, you heard me right: I have the most secure laptop in the world. I have no anti-virus software, but I'm confident that I'm protected from every malicious hacker. How, you ask, can I make such a seemingly preposterous statement?

A month ago, at Mary's urging, I bought a new laptop during the sales tax holiday. But alas, procrastination set-in and that brand new laptop is still closed in its original box; secure from every hacker in the world.

Similarly, a bank, or any business for that matter, is pretty secure and safe from robbers if it is closed and never opens.

"Closed" is safer than "open," but the carrying-on of life, using my laptop as intended or transacting banking business, only happens if risk is taken and the laptop is taken out of the box or the business is opened for customers.

In today's gospel, the people brought a deaf mute to Jesus. This man was physically incapacitated because his ears were closed to hearing and his mouth was closed to speech. But Jesus had compassion for this man, touched his ears and his tongue, and said "Ephphatha; be opened." The man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosened. Jesus opened a new chapter in this man's life which permitted him to participate in a world which had previously been closed to him.

As baptized Catholics, we too have had our ears and mouths "opened." In the baptismal rite for children, the minister of baptism, whether a priest or a deacon, performs the "Ephphatha" Rite. In this rite, the minister touches the ears and mouth of the child with his thumb, saying:

"May the Lord Jesus, who made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak, grant that you may soon receive his word with your ears and profess the faith with your lips, to the glory and praise of God the Father."

The Lord touches our ears with his word every time we hear Scripture read, while our mouths profess the faith every time we recite the Creed.

But receiving the word is more than just hearing his word, because now that we've heard, God expects a response. Our faith is intended to empower us to love and serve God in this life so as to be happy with him forever in the next. So, we need to "be opened" and act.

- **We need to be open to help others.** In the gospel we just heard, some people brought the deaf mute to Jesus and "begged him to lay his hand on him." These unnamed people demonstrated goodwill and charity since bringing others to Jesus is the noblest and most precious gift we can give. May we be open to helping others.
- **We need to be open to leaving the crowd.** The deaf mute was open and allowed Jesus to take "him off by himself away from the crowd," which was the first step in his healing. Many of us are adversely affected by the crowd, by all the noise and turmoil in the world today from both the social and popular media. We need to be open and allow the Lord to take us away from the crowd so we can experience his healing touch which transforms us to becoming hearers of his word, committed to proclaiming his name.
- **We need to be open to breaking barriers.** When Jesus healed the deaf mute, he broke the socially-accepted barrier between "normal" people and the disabled; Jesus bridged the gap between the well and unwell. In the second reading from St. James, we heard a similar message that we should show no partiality between rich and poor. Today, we need to break the social, economic, political and religious barriers that separate us.
- **We need to be open to the healing touch of the Lord.** The man, the deaf mute, was open, he was willing, to have Jesus put his finger in his ears and touch his tongue. We need to open

our ears to God's healing touch by listening to and acting upon his word and also be open to his touch in our mouths through the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

- Finally, **we need to be open to being open.** The call for openness, for transparency in both the government and the Church, resounds throughout our society. Openness requires us to listen with profound charity and speak with charity and clarity. Notice that the Lord healed the deaf mute's ears first, before the mouth, thereby emphasizing the importance of listening over talking. Today, we can begin such openness with our families and friends.

Help others...

Leave the crowd...

Break barriers...

Be open to the Lord...

Be open to being open.

Ephphatha!