

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Times Bb

I would like to invite you to be aware of things that open. Let's look around and see if you can tell me a thing that opens.... Any ideas?

A door: it opens so that we can go in and out of the house. Inside we can feel safe and protected from the elements. A flower: it opens and when it does we can see its full beauty. An opened flower releases seeds, and cause s other flowers to grow. A bottle: we open bottles to get nourishment, such as juice and milk. A Book: we learn new things when we open a book and can read stories that take us on an exciting adventure.

In today's Gospel, we heard about the healing the deaf-mute man with his command, "Ephphatha!" – which means, "Be opened!" Just like the things we mentioned at the beginning, this command of Jesus opens up for us a bulk of spiritual realities that bring us great encouragement and peace of mind. It is a command that heals; it is a command that touches our hearts; it is a command that gives life. It is a genuine expression of God's providential care to all of us. It is Jesus personally telling us, "You are loved!" "You are cared for."

Looking into our lives, we do experience God's love every day in our lives. We can think of the daily blessings we receive from God everyday. We have our loving family or a good job, a beautiful house, a great friend or spouse. But amidst all these daily blessings in our lives, just like the deaf-mute man in our gospel today, we, too, experience, in one way or another, some kind of deafness or muteness in our lives. Perhaps, we may be suffering from a physical sickness that is painful and draining. We may be undergoing a lot of stress in our lives because of financial worries, or we are having a problematic relationship. We may be fighting addictions in our lives, or battling low self-esteem or a quick temper. We may be struggling with providing for our families and raising our kids. In front of these challenges confronting us, we sometimes feel helpless and overwhelmed, discouraged even to certain point that we ask, "Does God really cares?"

But our Lord is telling us today in our first reading, "Be Strong! Fear not! Here is your God; He comes to save you!" Indeed, Jesus loves us so much that he comes to us personally just like what he did with the deaf-mute man, taking us with

him by himself, to heal us and make us whole. God sees through where we are hurting in our lives. He knows the difficult issues that we have in our lives. He is aware that we need him. He offers himself to us, taking with him all our struggles and difficulties, making them his own. Indeed, he wants us to feel loved and cared for. Jesus is our hope; he is our healer; he is our savior; he is our Lord! He is our Door, our Flower, our Bottle, our Book – that opens up His Divine love and mercy to save us and make us whole.

It is true that we always hear these words of comfort and inspiration that we can find in Jesus especially when we are in church. Sometimes we may think of them just as spiritual platitudes or religious clichés to make us feel good in times of difficulties. However when we do experience or undergo challenges and hardship in our lives, these words of Jesus become alive, not because they make us feel good, but because they truly give us hope, they truly give us strength, they truly give us courage and peace.

We cannot always understand hope and yet we can have it. We cannot always explain faith and yet it makes sense in our hearts. We cannot put words in the love of God for us, and yet when we have seen it at work in our lives, we too are able to recognize it. It inspires us to work harder and overcome the things that bother us. Having Jesus in our lives is truly life giving and greatly inspiring because His care for us is for real. It is shown everyday in our lives – the air we breathe, the people who care and support us. Jesus is ever-present in our lives notwithstanding of all the challenges and shortcomings we have. God's desire to heal us and to make us whole is true and sincere. We only need to trust him. We only need to let Him touch our hearts. Yes, we only need to listen to his word, "Ephphatha!" "Be Opened!" Amen.