

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

...and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

This was a sign of the Messiah. *Isaiah* had said, in our first reading, that the eyes of the blind would be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared, the lame would leap like a stag and the tongue of the mute would sing. The people realized that Jesus was performing these signs. With a joy beyond comprehension, they realized that the Messiah was among them.

People are looking for hope. They are looking for joy. They are looking for some good news. There is an abundance of bad news out there. We don't need to itemize all the areas of concern in the world. There are plenty of people who tell us what is wrong with the country and the world, ignoring the fact that they are themselves part of the problem. It is easy for us to join in with the negativity. If we have a pessimistic attitude towards life, we will miss the wonders of the Lord all around us.

St. Paul wrote *1 Corinthians 3* that everything belongs to the faithful Christian: the world, life, death, the present and the future. All belongs to us, and we belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

The world belongs to us. Everything that God created reflects Him. St. Augustine called this the analogy of being. He said that if we consider the beauty, goodness and truth of everything the Lord made, we would have a finite reflection of His Divinity.

The world really is beautiful. And it is given to us. We can look at a beautiful sunset and say, "Wonderful job, God." We can look at the flowers and wonder how beautiful our God is. We can look at the birds of the air and the animals of the field and we are struck with wonder at our Creator. All this is given as gift to us. Yes, we can, and sadly often do, pervert His creation by using it in a selfish way, in a way where His hand is not recognized. But, when we do not misuse his creation, we come to a deeper appreciation of His gifts. Consider physical love. Yes, we can pervert this through selfishness. That is the basis of the sex industry. But when we put God in the center of physical love, His love, sacrificial love, then sex becomes marital love, and is one His many gifts. We need to open

our ears, hear the Good News, and open our mouths and proclaim to others that all that God has given us is good as long as we keep Him in its center.

Life belongs to us. When we hold a baby, we are in wonder at this new life. All good parents will do anything for this new life. They begin caring for their child as soon as they know their child is coming. From pre-natal care to helping their adult children settle down in their own lives, good parents love with God's love, sacrificial love. When the Lord is removed from the consideration of life, then people misuse the gift of life, destroying it.

Yet, when people recognize the gift of life as coming from the Creator, then their own lives are enriched by their participation in creation. People need to hear this. We need to hear this. Life is beautiful. We need to open our ears, hear the Good News and then proclaim to others that God's image and likeness is found in every human being from womb to tomb, here in our country and wherever people are found throughout the world.

And death is given to us. How is that a gift? Well, people who do not believe in the Lord of Life view death as a final end to existence. We have hope. Death is a transition from one state of living as God's people to another state of living as his people. This second state of being is far superior to the first because we enjoy a deeper and fuller union with God. We need to be open to this truth in our lives. We cannot allow ourselves to fall into the despair of the godless elements of the world. And we need to open our mouths and let people know that with Jesus Christ, death is not an end, it is a beginning.

The present is ours and the future. God has given us the ability to enrich the world with His Kingdom. People go to the mission lands to help others recognize the hand of God in their lives. They return realizing how much God is loved among the poorest of people. Politicians speak about the wonderful future they will provide if they are elected. The only truly wonderful future is that future which is centered on God. We can provide this future for our children. The future is given to us. We just need to keep our ears open to the ways we can allow God's wonders into the world, and we need to call people to be part of the reconstruction of the world according to God's plan.

When Jesus opened the deaf man's ears, when He helped the man speak clearly, He performed a miracle. When we are open to hear the Good News of God's gifts; when we proclaim to the world the wonders of our Creator; then people will come to a deeper realization of their infinite worth and the beauty of their lives, and their capacity to be united to God now and forever. This is the Good News of Jesus Christ. And it is miraculous.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella