

September 9, 2018
23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

My ordination classmate, Fr. Rick Spicer, who is pastor at St. Hubert's Parish in Langley. He had a stressful birth left him which left him with a severe hearing impaired and speech impediment. His condition has only grown worse throughout the years. Despite the great advances in hearing aid technology, he has to lip-read in order to understand what people are saying and so he cannot hear confessions behind the screen and communication over the telephone is next to impossible. E-mail and text messaging are his friends.

I thought of my friend as I studied and prayed over the readings and what they mean for us. Spiritually, all of us are born hearing impaired due to original sin. It can be hard for us, even impossible at times, to hear the voice of God, to understand the message of his truth and his love. How much easier it can be to listen to the voices of negative self-talk, to see the worst in others, to be discouraged, to get stuck in anger than it can be to truly live in God's peace. The journey of the peace that God desires for us begins in baptism, when we are chosen by God to be his very own.

The reading from the 7th Chapter of Mark's Gospel today is rich with baptismal imagery. Jesus use his native Aramaic language "*—Ephphatha!—that is, "be open!"*" The optional prayer over the eyes and ears of the nearly baptized uses this very phrase and is a powerful insight into the meaning of our baptism and into what it means to be a mature disciple of Jesus Christ. A mature disciple is one who constantly strives to hear the voice of Christ and to never give up no matter how difficult it might be, which can be humbling. Notice that Jesus took the deaf man off to a separate place so that he could personal experience his healing touch, so he could hear his voice without distraction.

Fr. Rick is in my prayer support group of priests called "Jesu Caritas" that meets each third Monday of the month. It takes humility for him to constantly ask us if he heard us correctly in conversations and often times he has missed a key point as the conversation makes a subtle change in topic. I notice the same in my relationship with Lord, that I need to constantly check through my Jesu Caritas group, through my spiritual director, through my personal prayer; am I really hearing the Lord's voice, or not? We all need a heavy dose of humility to

acknowledge that just because we think we have heard the Lord's voice, we might have missed the message altogether.

My ears were open to hear God's voice in a new and deeper way when as I seminarian I developed the practice of praying before the Blessed Sacrament. After about a year of this daily practice, I was having a profound experience of being with the Lord and I felt such calm and peace, and then a mosquito flew into my ear, z-z-z-t! And that wonderful feeling was gone! There I was, communing with the source of all that is and the tiniest creature got in the way. I realized that it doesn't take much to get distracted from the Lord.

Growth in the Lord, to set aside all that distracts us from him happens only we decide each day to make him the center of our lives. Silent times part of the communal celebration of the Liturgy, for instance, calling to mind our sins at the Penitential Act, the silence following when the priest says "Let us pray" and before he actually speaks the collect, that is the opening prayer, silence following each reading and the homily, finally the silence after we have all received communion and are seated. Think of these times as the Lord taking us aside, and saying *Ephphatha! Open your ears and heart to me!* Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is one way and our Worship Commission is looking at ways to promote adoration in our parish. Another way to grow in the Lord is through attending a CRHP retreat. The women's is October 13 & 14 and the men's is November 3 & 4. If you have not yet attended, I encourage you to do so.

In whatever way you can, allow the Lord to say not only to your ears, but even more to open your heart, *Ephphatha—be opened!* He calls us to hear his voice and then to live that message. It our decision to listen or not.