



September 9, 2012
Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Then Jesus looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him 'Ephphatha'—that is, 'Be opened'" Mark 7:34

Dear Friends;

The old man was almost stone deaf. So he asked his doctor if anything could be done about his affliction. The doctor was able to fit him with hearing aids that allowed him to hear like new. A month later when the man came back to the doctor for his regular checkup the doctor said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again" The old man replied, "Oh I haven't told my family yet. I just sit and listen to their conversations. I have already changed my will three times!"

All three of our readings today urge us to be open and listen to God's healing Word. Isaiah invites us to a courage that trusts that God will restore the world. James challenges us to value the poor. And Jesus tells us to be opened because He is the Word by which our world—all of us together—will be made new.

Communication is always difficult even when our hearing is in perfect working order. Have you in conversation ever caught yourself not listening? The person is talking you hear the sound of their voice but your mind is somewhere else. You could not repeat what they said if your life depended on it. You were hearing but not listening.

Sometimes our inability to listen is also hindered by our experiences, prejudices and judgments. Leonard Pitts Jr. of the Miami Herald reports of a study in the 1990's. People were invited to imagine a drug-user and then describe the person they imagined. Ninety-five percent envisioned a black person. This is despite the observable reality that only fifteen percent of drug-users are black. The point is that we carry with us biases that prevent us from hearing the truth. We cannot hear because our pre-determined ideas are often at odds with reality. Then we can only speak monologues past each other.

Biases are the very thing that James is confronting in today's second reading. When members of the community showed favor to the rich over the poor they have divided the community, they have failed the common good and "become judges handing down corrupt decisions." They have failed to hear the Word spoken in Jesus, "Did not God choose those who were poor in the world to be rich in faith...?" (James 2:5)

When I am working with couples preparing for marriage, one of the things that are always critical is communication. I often will have a discussion with the couple on something called "active listening." Active listening is a way to get beyond our pre-judged ideas of what the other person is saying. In active listening, the one party is not allowed to make his/her point until he/she adequately summarizes the partner's statements to the satisfaction of the partner. It is a good discipline that helps us get into the message that the other is communicating.

Today we are invited to actively listen to the message that God sends us in his living Word, Jesus. Are we opened up to his radical vision of the Kingdom? Listen carefully!

Peace

Fr. Ron