

two more visual cues. And then Jesus speaks. Even though the man couldn't hear, Jesus speaks. And it is the power of His Word, "Ephphatha, that is, be opened" that causes the man's hearing to be opened. Your inserts says the man's *ears* were opened, but the text says his *hearing* was opened. His ears weren't closed, otherwise his ears would have looked like this: [*folding ears*]. The man's hearing was opened and, literally, the bond of his tongue was loosened. It is as if handcuffs were on the man's tongue, and the Word of Jesus loosened them, freeing the man to speak clearly and plainly!

What happened to the deaf man physically is exactly what happened to you in your Baptisms spiritually. This is precisely what my ASL professor needed to know. For both he and we today need to know purpose for which Jesus performed miracles such as healing this deaf man, that we may perceive our own miraculous healings. We were all born spiritually blind, deaf, and God's enemy. But, in Holy Baptism, Satan's chains have been loosened. "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Rom 6:22). By the grace of the Holy Spirit, through the faith that He gives, the chains formerly enslaving you to sin, death, and the power of the Devil have been severed. You are now free to live under the Gospel.

In the old Baptismal rites, there used to be a part where the Pastor would speak to the one to be baptized, "Ephphatha, that is, be opened!" The significance of Jesus healing the deaf man is seen by comparison particularly when infants are baptized. For just as the deaf man could not hear Jesus say, "Ephphatha!" so also babies cannot discern the meaning of God's Word in Baptism. And yet, just as the power of Jesus' words opened the hearing of the deaf man so that he could hear and could speak, so also the power of God's Word in Baptism slays the Old Adam, and regenerates the baptized into new life with Christ, giving both infant and adult alike the ears of faith to believe God's Word, and to trust in the forgiveness of sins Jesus offers.

The deaf man who could now hear could also, as the text says, "speak plainly" (Mk 7:36). The word translated plainly is "orthos", where we get the word *orthodoxy* from. We might think of the word orthodox only in association with a church body such as the Greek Orthodox. But one who is small "o" orthodox is one who gives God "right" or "correct praise." As the deaf man was mute and could now *physically* speak rightly, so also by God's grace through faith, we as Christians can now *spiritually* speak rightly. To give God right or correct praise is to confess who God is and what God has done according to His Word! This is why parents are so important; to teach their children God's Word!

Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-15, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." And again, in Colossians 2:6-8, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."

To give God right praise we have to know God's Word. And yet mere knowledge is not saving faith. Simply believing the historical fact that Jesus healed the deaf man is not saving faith. Confessing who God is and what He has done in "right praise" is not saving faith either. Saving faith is that which believes Jesus has healed *your* spiritual inability to hear and believe God's Word. Saving faith confesses, "Jesus, you have healed *me*, washing my sins away. I once was deaf, but now I hear." For as the Epistle reading today concluded, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). You think Jesus healing a deaf man is pretty spectacular? How much more Jesus healing you from spiritual death! By His grace in the waters of Baptism and through the spoken Word of Christ, He has given you spiritual rebirth (Tit 3:5). As Jesus healed a deaf man, so also Jesus has healed and continues to heal you through His Word and Sacraments. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. In Jesus' name, Amen.