

23rd Sun OT – Mark 7:31-37, “Be Opened!”

When I was young, I used to stutter and pretty bad, too. But I didn't think that I had a problem, it was just that other people were impatient with me whenever I wanted to say anything beyond a yes or a no response. Of course, I was labeled **the dummy, the idiot**. “Don't waste you time with him, or you will be here all day just trying to get a simple response.”

It was especially frustrating when I really wanted to express myself, especially my feelings, which was when the stuttering usually got worse. Only those who were patient enough and to truly want to listen to me, took the time to let me express myself. Of course, my mother was one of those, who not only took the time but even encouraged me to speak without interruption. She was also the type of person who would keep up with the recent childhood methods of raising children. I think it was Dr. Spock, before he became the “Enterprise's” main physician.

My Mom would spend a lot of time with me in front of a mirror getting me to slow down and pronounce my words slowly, especially the “r” and the “l”. Since I would be starting school soon, she realized almost a little too late that my stuttering may delay my start of school. Day after day we practiced. I hated those times, until one day it started to pay off. And for some reason, all of sudden I started to slow down and speak “normally” as my brothers and sisters said excitedly. But I still had to be careful, since even in my excitement I would start to stutter again.

Sorry to say, my brothers and sisters were embarrassed by my stuttering. They were relieved to finally have a “normal speaking” brother again. But they knew that any excitement would start me stuttering again. Not surprisingly, they would purposefully get me excited just to get me stuttering, especially if my Mother showed me too much attention.

In the movie “Children of a Lesser God,” was about the life of a young woman who taught at a school for the deaf. Because she would read lips so well, no one suspected unless the person turned away from her and she could see their lips. It was the dance floor that she surprised her boyfriend who was “normal” because she could dance, by feeling the vibrations through the floor. Naturally I identified with her.

The reason I am reflecting on the deaf is that we are all sometime or another deaf to God who is trying to get through to us. I don't like using “deaf” as an

example of our own spiritual deafness because of its negative connotation. I was pleasantly surprised by Kristine Meneses in her reflection from *Catholic Women Preach*, and she wrote this.

“It is possible that while walking away from the crowd, Jesus was trying to start a conversation with the man. Perhaps the Deaf man at this point would have wanted to stop Jesus and communicate that he could not hear by pointing to his ear and tongue and shaking his hands indicating that is nothing.”

Kristine asked several of her deaf friends for their response to this passage. For most they see in this scene Jesus taking his time, looking intently at the Deaf man, and trying to understand his self-expression. And she writes, “It is when the two see eye-to-eye that Jesus realizes he must “be open” or “Ephphatha”—this time to a person who cannot hear and whose tongue is not spoken with words, but expressed with *body movements*, and who listens not with his ears but with his **eyes**.”

It is an interesting interpretation, even though it side-steps the miraculous participation of Jesus. However, it does address my own experience and others who do take the time to listen to each other with patience that they will eventually reach understanding and maybe, just maybe, an “Ephphatha” experience.

The author mentions that the deaf person can offer new insights about this narrative because we so often exclude them from the conversation. She goes on to ask, how does a medicalized reading of this gospel affect Deaf people. Forcing them to hear and speak is painful, even with sign language. She suggests that we let today’s gospel challenge us to see deafness not as a deformity or a defect, but as a way of life and Deaf people not as a group of objects to be cured or repaired, but as unique and diverse individuals.

The gospel challenges us to “Be opened” to the Word of God and live it out by our patience with others to truly understand what they are trying to tell us, understanding that at times words cannot always express so clearly what we truly feel inside. In this fast-paced world in which we live in where time is at a premium, what better way to model Christ by not so much giving monetary aid but giving our time and our patience to someone who may truly need it in their moment of need and especially of misunderstanding.