

Here is your God,  
he comes with vindication;  
with divine recompense  
he comes to save you.  
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,  
the ears of the deaf be cleared;  
then will the lame leap like a stag,  
Then the tongue of the mute will sing Is 35

Could there be a more hope-filled and encouraging reading in the Hebrew Scriptures than today's selection from Isaiah? In the eighth century BCE the people of Israel were in fear and trembling: the northern kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians and the people taken into exile. Those in Judah, the southern kingdom, were enslaved. And if that wasn't bad enough, then the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and things truly got awful.

It is to these decimated people that the prophet Isaiah speaks, encouraging them to stand firm and continue to believe and trust God. "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened... The ears of the deaf be cleared." The blind will look and see signs of God coming to help them

In many ways we have been made exiles, desert travelers, by the long months of the pandemic, we are exhausted, we are unsure, some of us are pessimistic and are giving into conspiracy theories and great negativity. Isaiah encourages us not to be fainthearted, or doubt what God can do to make our deserts bloom. "Here is your God... Who comes to save you."

In these past couple of weeks, I have had to remind myself and stand on the sure ground, that I am a man of hope, a man of faith, a man that believes that God is in charge. And I have had to mind myself of the promised, he will give new sight and hearing to his people. As a man of God, as a disciple of Jesus and am called to have faith and courage..." hope in Him still; hope in God".

There is something unusual about the gospel reading today: A deaf man is healed? Not so much...pretty ordinary in the day of Jesus. What's so different about this instance, is not that he healed the man, but how the healing happened. The man is healed because people cared for him and brought him to Jesus.

They "begged him to lay his hand on him." It is the faith of the people that moved Jesus to heal him.

When we pray at Mass, or with others, for the needs of community members and people beyond, we are doing what the people in the gospel did – bringing people to Jesus and speaking on their behalf. We trust Jesus to hear us and will come to his people to save and set them free.

Also, the gospel is **not just about one man's ears being opened, is it?** It is our story too, because Ephphatha is a prayer we say often. It is said in our baptism. After the baptism takes place this "opening prayer" is said. The priest, or deacon, touches the ears and then the mouth of the one baptized and prays:

*Ephphatha, "Be Open! The Lord has made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May He soon touch your ears to receive the word and your mouth to proclaim His faith to the praises and glory of God the Father. Amen"*

This Ephphatha or opening to Christ at baptism is just the first of many opening to Christ all through our life. There are many moments when we are invited to be open, to ear or to speak, God's truth. And more importantly the truth of that opening may remind us not to be closed in mind, heart or soul to the power of God given to us at baptism and sustained in us, every time we come to him.

We can pray at today's liturgy for the full effects of the Ephphatha prayer: that we have open ears to God's voice and speak that Word plainly when we are asked about our faith; when someone needs to hear a good word of hope and faithfulness from us; and when we need to remind ourselves not to be afraid and that we are Children of God, Sons and Daughters of the Light and Disciples of Hope.

Amen!