

Homily: Sept. 5, 2021

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We gather today, celebrating God who continually opens us up—opens us beyond our little worlds. God opens us to pray for others rather than just for our own needs. Today we hold in our hearts the 2,996 victims of 9/11 (2001) and the many innocent Middle-Easterners & Muslims who suffered hostile discrimination thereafter. Today, the vigil of Labor Day, we also hold laborers in our prayers, especially medical personnel, who are suffering exhaustion and deep frustration caring for COVID patients, and witnessing many more young people dying.

For the times we have not been as open as God desires us to be, we call out, “Lord have mercy.”

Only the Son of God, the God of wide-open love, could so authoritatively order ears and mouth to open with, “***Ephphatha!* Be opened!**”

The openness and wideness of God’s love can cause great reversals, great turn-arounds to something much better, as depicted by Isaiah, by Psalm 146, and by today’s Gospel: dry desert flows with streams; deaf hear, mute speak, lame leap; the oppressed enjoy justice; hungry enjoy food; refugees receive homes; strangers enjoy protection. St. James proclaims God’s basic reversing action: “God chose the **poor** in the world to be **rich** in faith and heirs in the kingdom.” What a lovingly open God!

As I go on my morning jog, I often sense that I am among God’s amazing reversals. When I see homeless people in cars or under trees, or sheltering in recesses of buildings, I have a hunch that these folks have a completely different and perhaps richer perspective about life than I do. The Somali and Turkish refugees, whom I have met, often have a deep patience and tolerance about life and people—because they had to depend so totally on others for various forms of help, usually from people of other races and religions.

When they first arrived, many refugees had to take on menial jobs in spite of having been successful business people in their homeland, or even members of upper echelons of government. Many of them impress me as being more grateful

and appreciative than I am. These great reversals to the good in the poor and refugees would not be possible except for what appears to be the key word of today's Gospel. What did you hear as that key word?

The key word, I think, is **EPHPHATHA – BE OPENED!** Be open to what? Being open to something better. Imagine the group of people bringing this deaf-mute to Jesus. They were open; they were hopeful; they wanted the best for their deaf-mute brother. That deaf-mute man didn't resist. He was open, too. Open to let Jesus stick his fingers into his ears. He ended up being healed—ears and mouth open to hear and speak plainly. In God, openness births more openness.

So the Risen Jesus today is calling out to us all. Is there a deafness or muteness we, too, need to have healed? Have we been deaf or mute to a family member? Are we contributing to the paralyzing polarities in our church and society by not being open? Jesus is calling upon the whole Church--“Ephphatha” – be open and be honest, especially to important and difficult realities. Open and ready to listen to the truth of the abused, including the voices of abused native American children—alive and buried. Open to hear about any and all kinds of injustices that may still be occurring even within this very human and yet divine church. Let us hear “Ephphatha” and be open to speak for justice in our church and world rather than becoming mute out of fear of lessened Sunday collections and donations.

Ephphatha – be open—be hopeful—be courageous in Christ and like Christ!
Ephphatha!