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In baptism, the priest or deacon touches the mouth and ears of the newly baptized child and says,

The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak.

May he soon touch your ears to receive his word,
and your mouth to proclaim his faith,
to the praise and glory of God the Father.

All: Amen.

It is a reference to today's reading, in which Christ opened the mouth and ears of a deaf and mute man, fulfilling the prophecy spoken about in the first reading that told us God would come and do precisely that. Hearing is the primary way that we come to faith. For centuries, most people could not read, so they had to be taught orally, through preaching, or visually, through stained glass. But stained glass without hearing an explanation would not suffice to teach. To not be able to hear was to be unable to receive the faith. Understand this is before the modern ways we teach those who are deaf. This is 2,000 years ago. To be unable to speak meant being unable to respond. This speaks to a reality that many today don't understand: without the community, practically speaking, there is no faith to be passed to the next generation. Without teachers, who would know that the Bible was even a special book, that it was the Word of God? It would appear no more special to someone who pulled it randomly off a shelf than the *Lord of the Rings*, Shakespeare, or Dante. Scripture tells us that "Faith comes through hearing." No one can believe unless someone has preached to them. Faith is always about belonging to the community. Christ established a Church, a people called together: a whole group of imperfect people. In fact, even within a few decades of Christ's life the community was getting it wrong. We heard about it in the second reading. Imagine coming to coffee hour and being told that you can't have anything because you don't give much to the weekly collection. That's basically what was going on in the time of James. That doesn't mean we can have faith apart from the community.

On a deeper level, Pope Benedict notes that this word we hear, "Be opened" could sum up the whole mission of Jesus. The word is left in the Aramaic, when the rest of the Gospel is in Greek, meaning that word was intended to be emphasized by the author. Because to be unable to both hear to speak makes relationships hard if not impossible, being opened touches the whole of the human person: it touches the heart.

"There is an inner closure that affects the person's inmost self, which the Bible calls the 'heart' It is this that Jesus came to 'open', to liberate, so as to enable us to live to the full our relationship

with God and with others. This is why I said that this small word, ‘ephphatha — be opened’, sums up in itself Christ’s entire mission. He was made man so that man, rendered inwardly deaf and mute by sin, might be able to hear God’s voice, the voice of Love that speaks to his heart, and thus in his turn learn to speak the language of love, to communicate with God and with others.” We need to be opened so that we can have our hearts of stone taken from us and replaced with hearts of flesh, hearts transformed by grace, that we might truly love God and neighbor as we ought.

This leads me to my second point, which is that being opened is not just an openness to hear the word of God but to share it. We are called to proclaim the faith. That does not mean being pushy. Evangelization is about announcing the good news that God has worked in history and in our own lives. As Pope Benedict notes, “We impose our faith on no one. Such proselytism [that is, trying to force someone to convert] is contrary to Christianity. Faith can develop only in freedom. But we do appeal to the freedom of men and women to open their hearts to God, to seek him, to hear his voice.” There is an organization that can be hired to do studies of churches and faith life in various communities.

In 2013, the Barna group did a survey of Christians, *only* ones who said they had made “*a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today.*” It showed that most Catholics in the US do not practice evangelization, as only 1/3 agreed with the statement “*During the past 12 months, I explained my religious beliefs to someone who had different beliefs, in the hope that they might accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.*”

This is not what we pray for the newly baptized!

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and your mouth to *proclaim* his faith,
to the praise and glory of God the Father.

I would like to conclude with words from our Holy Father Francis on the importance of evangelization today.

“In our day Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples” echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary “going forth”. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.”

He recognizes the challenge, that it might be uncomfortable, but it remains the obligation of all the baptized nonetheless. It remains our obligation to evangelize.