

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

You may know the saying: “*getting old is not for the faint of heart.*” It’s usually spoken with a bit of light-heartedness, but that does not take away from the truth it conveys. The longer we live, the more we experience pain. It doesn’t even have to be big pains or terrifying pains but those nagging, physical pains.

On the other hand, it’s not the exclusive domain of aging: suffering, illness, death...they are certainly with us in this life, and they cause for many a crisis of the faith—anger, doubt, questions. How can I believe in a God who is supposedly all-powerful and good, yet who creates or causes or, at least, allows such evil, deafness, speech impediments, blindness, cancer, diabetes, heart disease?

Of course, it’s important to affirm that God is not the creator of evil or its cause. Evil is something that is completely foreign to a holy God. It’s also important to affirm that God did not make us so that we might suffer. He didn’t make us susceptible to sickness or make us so that we might die. Certainly not.

God made all things good and very good, but Satan had other plans for this good creation and found easy prey in Adam and Eve. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin, and by that sin, **not God’s action but man’s**, came sickness and death, toil and hardship, pain and suffering—the creation’s groaning. It’s not what God intended; God created life, not death; holiness not sin; perfection not sickness. But what God intended is not what we have now—now we do have all the evil of sin and its consequences, and we have them no matter how much we try to avoid them or slow them down or seek after a fountain of youth.

Such was the reality of the probably Gentile man, deaf and mute, brought to Jesus in that region of the Decapolis to the east of Galilee. But that he was a Gentile didn’t matter to Jesus. All that mattered to Jesus was that this man was suffering the consequences of sin—not necessarily some special sin of his own, but the sin that has corrupted the whole world and manifests itself in sickness, brokenness, and finally death.

We experience the same reality today. Think about our own congregation; think about our prayer list. We feel the crushing consequences of sin in cancer and heart disease, in arthritis and the painful grinding of bone on bone in aging knees and hips, in eyes clouded over with cataracts and ears that can no longer distinguish sounds, in men and women with diabetes, in children born with physical difficulties, and finally, in death.

And yet in the midst of the reality of these consequences of sin—now and then—there is hope for mankind in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The deaf and mute man must have had hope. That’s why he was brought to Jesus and his

compatriots begged Jesus to lay His hands on the man and heal him. Confronted with the realization that this is not right—this is not as God had intended—they recognized also that only God could make it right. So they went to Jesus, the only One who could finally heal him in body and soul.

And Jesus was not deaf to their cry for mercy. The eternal Word of God, through whom all things were made, poked His fingers in the man's ears and spoke a word not unlike His original creative words "*let there be ...*" Jesus said, "*Be opened,*" "*Ephphatha.*" And it was so. The deaf man's ears were unstopped; He could hear the word of God.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, spat and touched the man's tongue and with sigh said, "*Ephphatha,*" "*be opened.*" The re-creative word came forth from the lips of the Son of God who was dwelling with His creation, and the mute man's tongue was loosed to sing for joy the praises of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And the people, who witnessed these miracles, confessed in words again like those God spoke in the garden, "*It is very good—He has done all things well—creation is restored, the deaf hear; the mute speak.*"

God is still at work today; He is still our strength and shield, our saving refuge. He still hears your cries for help, your pleas for mercy, and He does help. He sends doctors, nurses, moms and dads, all kinds of people to work in your lives to keep you alive and healthy and safe day after day—although you probably won't find the people God sends sticking their fingers in your ears or touching your tongues with spittle.

Still, although we talk about the miracles of modern medicine, although we may marvel at the strength and power, the wisdom, the schooling and knowledge of health care professionals, they cannot heal like Jesus. To be sure, they give us medication and prescribe rest, but that's mostly just to help our bodies heal themselves. They open our veins and give us replacement joints that help us get along better for a while, but they do not heal us as Jesus does. They surely help sustain our lives for a while; they may stave off death for a moment or a day or a year, but they cannot save us. They neither created life nor can they promise eternal life, and they certainly don't operate simply by a word.

Such is the difference between the works of man and the Word of God. Doctors and nurses may diagnose, prod and poke, and even come up with some solutions for a time, but Jesus entered this man's life by His divine Word and touch. Jesus healed this man's infirmities. He gave the man cause to sing for joy and to proclaim the goodness of the Lord. He gave the man hope.

This is the ultimate healing and hope that we need also, and only Jesus can give it—not simply the healing of your body, but of your soul. Regarding your physical infirmities, you may be healed as God works through His instruments of compassion: doctors and nurses, but it may not happen this side of the grave. But regarding the healing you need most, that can only come from the Word, incarnate of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. You need the healing that comes from the fleshly Word that lived a life free from sin and yet became sin for you. You need the healing of the Word that was stricken and smitten by God, afflicted with the wounds of our sin, and yet it is precisely these wounds that heal you. You need the healing Word of Christ’s forgiveness because your consciences may be feeling a little guilty for being angry at God, for questioning His goodness, for doubting that His grace is sufficient for you. You need the word of grace commanded by Christ and connected to water which washed away your sin and created faith in you; you need the word of absolution spoken by pastors as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it your sins are forgiven before God in heaven; you need the flesh and blood Word eaten and drunk under bread and wine that strengthens your faith and causes you to cling to Him and nothing else.

This Word of God, Jesus, and the words that he speaks, are your life and your hope, dear Christian. In the midst of things you do not understand, when you are in trial and heartache, when you are hurt and despairing, it is He and His word that will sustain you. For He has said, “*Ephphatha*,” and opened the lips of your pastor to proclaim your God, who came to save you. He has said “*Ephphatha*,” and opened your ears to hear His word, opened your hearts to believe this good news, and opened your mouths to declare His praise.

So hear again His word and be comforted. There may be no easy answers for those who are suffering, no quick fixes. And it’s not going to get any easier as you get older. But you can trust this: the Word of God, Jesus, has taken all of your hurts and sorrows, all of your diseases and aches and pains, and has taken them into His holy wounds, wounds suffered for you on a cross, wounds from which even today flow the lifeblood of the Church—the forgiveness of our sins. Believe this Word; then come to His table. Eat His body wounded and drink His blood that pours from His wounds and trust: by these you are healed unto everlasting life.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.