

SEPTEMBER 8-9, 2018

STARTING THIS WEEK

- And for the next six weeks
 - o I am going to try something different when it comes to preaching
- Back in the spring of this year
 - o Some of us from OLC attended the Rebuilt Conference
 - At Church of the Nativity in Timonium
 - o I know some of you have been to Nativity for different events
 - And you know it is somewhat different than most other Catholic Churches in the Archdiocese
 - If not the country
- Nativity has a three pronged focus on what it means to be Church
 - o First they focus everything on the Unchurched
 - And trying to do what they can to invite and welcome to Church
 - Those who do not go to church or maybe do not even know Jesus
 - o Second they focus all of the church's efforts on Sunday
 - Or what they call the Sunday experience
 - And their sub-focus is music, message, and ministry
 - o And Third they focus on empowering those who go to Church
 - To become more engaged in their discipleship
 - To not just attend Mass each week
 - But to get involved
 - o And to become evangelizers in their communities

THE FOCUS OF THE SUNDAY EXPERIENCE

- Is the Message or what is typically called the Homily
- Nativity preaches the Message or Homily by having a theme over a period of time
 - o Usually 4-6 weeks or so
 - o So that the overall message for the 4-6 weeks is the same
 - But the homily each week expands on the message in a different way
 - Or with a different focus
 - o The overall message is also incorporated into all activities at the parish
 - So that the message is consistent throughout
 - Whether it be Religious Education or middle or high school YM or adult Faith formation or RCIA
 - Everyone that week is hearing the same message
 - o This method of preaching and its connection to all the activities of the parish
 - Has intrigued me because I feel there is something useful
 - And beneficial to having a clear, consistent message
 - That everyone knows
- So I have been working with our staff over the summer
 - o And we have come up with a Fall Message series at OLC
 - o Which we are calling – Be Open
 - And this weekend is the kick-off

OUR LANGUAGE IS FILLED WITH IMAGES OR PHASES

- That speak to being open to something or someone
- How many of us look forward each year to opening day for baseball
 - o Or maybe it is Opening Night for a Broadway show
 - o Or we may read about a job opening
 - At a place where we would like to work
 - o Or the joy of Christmas morning
 - As we open presents
- To welcome a stranger
 - o We may open a door for them or open our hearts or homes to guests
 - o We open windows to let in fresh air
 - o We open a book to read about a new adventure
- And sometimes we even have the courage to open up to our best friend
 - o When we are having a difficult time
 - o And just need someone who will be open to listening to us
- There are many ways and an abundance of opportunities
 - o For us to be open to new things, open to others
 - And, of course, open to God

OF COURSE, THE OPPOSITE OF BEING OPEN

- Is being closed off, or closed minded, or closed in on ourselves
 - o When we close something
 - It can sometimes be for the good
 - Like closing a chapter in our lives
 - o But when we close ourselves off from other people or other opinions
 - Or when we choose to isolate ourselves
 - Believing we are protecting ourselves from something
 - It can lead to darkness in our lives
 - Not knowing or over time, forgetting how to be neighbor
 - o Or friend to another in need
 - o One could easily draw the conclusion that the hierarchy of the Church
 - Has been closed off to the voices of the lay faithful
 - Believing they and they alone know what is best
 - And not being open to the thoughts of others
 - Who also may be guided by the Holy Spirit
 - o Since the Spirit has been given to all of us

TODAY IN THE GOSPEL

- Jesus encounters a deaf man with a speech impediment
 - o Someone who has spent his life in some sort of hearing isolation
 - Unable to hear what others are saying
 - And unable to speak clearly to others as well
 - o Through no fault of his own
 - This man's life has been closed off from the rest of the world
 - But thankfully

- The rest of the world had not closed him off from them
 - For the Gospel relates that he is brought to Jesus by the people
 - So that he can lay his hands on him
- Jesus through this unusual ritual
 - Of putting his finger into his ears
 - And spitting and touching his tongue
 - Utters the word – Ephphatha – which means “ Be Opened”
 - And immediately his ears and mouth are opened
 - This guy’s encounter with Jesus has forever changed his life
 - And has opened his heart and his mind to the healing power of God

THIS COULD ALSO BE A METAPHOR FOR US

- Although we may not be deaf or have a speech impediment
 - There may be parts of us that are closed off to God
 - Unable to hear the words of Jesus spoken to us in the scriptures
 - Or unable or not knowing how to speak to others about what Jesus has done for us
 - And in turn what Jesus can do for them
- God wants to meet us wherever we may be
 - And in whatever state of life we may find ourselves
 - To open our eyes to see his mighty works
 - To open our ears to hear his mighty words
 - And to open our mouths to proclaim his mighty love for us

WHERE DO YOU FEEL CLOSED OFF IN YOUR LIVE

- Have you closed yourself off to God in some fashion
 - Maybe by not praying regularly or skipping Mass more frequently
 - Or maybe just feeling isolated from God and others
 - For whatever reason
 - Or have the actions of others closed you off to Jesus
 - Maybe as a result of the clergy sex abuse crisis
 - Or the lack of accountability from the bishops
- Being closed off or closing ourselves off to God is not the way God created us to be
- Each of us is made in God’s image and likeness
 - And have within us a desire to know God
 - A longing to open ourselves to God
 - And allow God to flood our souls with His grace and love
 - And heal the brokenness or blindness or deafness
 - That is part of our human experience

OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS

- It is my plan and my hope that through this message series homily
 - To invite all of us to hear Jesus say to each one of us: Ephphatha
 - That is - Be Opened – BE OPEN to Journey with Jesus
 - **Be Open** to the mighty works of God in our lives