

A Homily for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity Sunday, Delivered on 23 August 2026 by Dcn. D. Andrew Masters at St. Matthew's Anglican Catholic Church, Newport Beach, CA

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.+

When the Gospel writers leave a word in the original language for us to see, it suggests that word carries great significance to the event. This morning “Ephphatha” was read and then the translation was given. “Be opened” is the command our Lord gave to this man’s ears. It is important to remember the healing commands of our Lord are always sacramental. That is the physical healing on the outside pointing to a spiritual reality on the inside of the formerly infirmed. On the outside, this man’s ears were opened to the Word of God, and his tongue was loosed to proclaim the Gospel. A miracle was also wrought on this man’s heart that let him receive God’s grace and then to give it to others.

In his letter, St. Paul encourages the church of Corinth that they are meant to be a strong witness to Christ. In fact, St. Paul is excited this church has leaned into their vocation to be a community focused on Christ. But St. Paul, in his humility, gives credit where credit is due. He quickly places credit in God for his ministry and for the growth demonstrated by the church he founded. Paul acknowledges that he could not have, on his own, founded that church. Indeed, it was God who filled Paul with sufficient gifts for the working of this ministry. This is true for our own ministries, we cannot actually do the job God has called us to do by our own strength, we need God to give us help, to make us sufficient to the task. This doesn’t mean that Paul ceased being Paul when he was doing this work. St. Paul became like the burning bush Moses encounters, burning but not consumed. The bush was enhanced by God’s presence, not destroyed, not replaced, but an instrument for his holy work. We are meant to be like the burning bush, our essence remains but we are enhanced by the Holy Spirit so that God and his Word will shine through us to illuminate others. There is a cooperation between us and God, and it is our work to allow God’s grace into our hearts so that we can be that light to others when we minister to the people we encounter in the various spheres of our lives.

When people hear the words “ministry” or “minister” they often think of a cleric at the church leading some program. In fact, ministries and ministers are broader categories than this image would suggest. We all have a ministry, whether that is part of our vocation as parents ministering to our children. If we are married, we minister to our spouses. Within our friendships we minister to our friends. At work we minister to our coworkers or clients. We all have people in our lives who God has purposefully placed there for us to minister to. The ministry part of these relationships goes above the job description. For instance, if we work at an office, and we do our job proficiently and complete all the tasks, and please our supervisors or clients with excellent work, we are performing our job well. If, when it is necessary to stop our tasks and listen and be present with a coworker who is going through a hard season and needs someone to talk to, then we are doing the work of our ministry. We are all called to minister to others, there is no getting out of that for Christians. To do ministry will cost us something, it will require a sacrifice from us to perform. It will also require resources; these resources come from God in the form of grace.

The Old Covenant was written in stone and is therefore an external document, initiated by God and agreed to by the Hebrews at Sinai. But as an external document, it could only be obeyed. However, no human could obey the Old Covenant, which only had the power to diagnose humanity of the condition of sin and the end prognosis was death. The New Covenant is written on the Heart by the Spirit and thus is an internal force that can change lives, producing a desire for the Good, and a will to love.

For the sake of our ministry, our job, therefore, is to increase our capacity to receive the Grace of God. To be clear, God supplies us his grace according to his will, but we are able to shut that grace out, to refuse it in part or in whole. Sometimes we shut this out willfully and sometimes we shut out God’s grace unknowingly because we are not used to receiving grace or we have diminished our capacity to receive it. Pharaoh of the Old Testament had such a low capacity for God’s grace that when God proposed grace to Pharaoh, he rejected it, resulting in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. This is why St. Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves before we take communion, it is for our own safety.

One way we can increase our capacity for receiving grace is through confession. Sin will make us less able to receive God's grace, not necessarily because God withholds it, but because we diminished our efficiency for receiving it. Confession is effective in unclogging this flow. If our conscience is burdened, then we must confess our sin and receive forgiveness. As the collect says, "forgive us those things whereof our conscience is afraid." And we need that forgiveness to increase that flow of grace. Remember that every time someone was healed by Jesus, a remission of sin was implied. This remission of sin came first, then the healing. When our Lord says "Ephphatha," that is, "be opened." The ears were opened to sound, but the heart was opened to grace. When we receive absolution in confession, it is an "Ephphatha" for our souls.

Another way we can increase our capacity for grace is through regular practices of prayer and fasting. We don't have to wait until lent to fast! Our church fasts Wednesdays for the mission and ministry of the diocese. Fasting removes good things in our lives that hold too much importance to us, it creates space within us to receive grace through prayer. When we pray, we are inviting God to give us grace, and he is faithful to oblige. Our collect gets to the essence of this: "Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art wont to give more than we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy... giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask."

Regularly receiving the sacraments increases our capacity for grace. Indeed, the very definition of sacrament is an outward visible sign of an inward grace. Sacraments give us grace to fulfill our vocations as Christians. We are new creatures by virtue of the sacrament of baptism. Through baptism we entered into the communion of the saints, into this holy community, Christ being the head. And in the sacrament of confirmation, we were given the Holy Ghost in a new way to live out our vocation, not as some exercise in self-improvement, but for something greater, which is, as St. Paul puts it in today's epistle, we have been made ministers of the New Covenant. The sacrament of the Eucharist feeds our souls and gives us sustenance to do this holy work of ministering to others.

Having a steady diet of prayer and sacrament trains our body and soul to receive the graces delivered to us by the Holy Spirit. We train ourselves to accept the gifts proposed to us by God so that it becomes reflexive.

The Lord knows who he has put in our lives and we need to be sufficient in our ministering to those people. Indeed, he wants to give more than we desire or deserve for this task, but God never forces anything on us, we must cooperate with him. God will supply those graces; our work is not necessarily to know what we need from him. Our business is to concentrate on making ourselves more open to the flow of grace by the Holy Spirit; to accept those excellent gifts he wants to give us.

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