

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MASS FOR FRIDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS FOUNDER'S FORUM
THE CLOISTER AT SEA ISLAND, GEORGIA
FEBRUARY 9, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am grateful for the invitation by Curtis Martin and Fr. Kevin Dyer to be with you today, to celebrate the Eucharist with you, and to share with you a reflection on the Word of God and the pastoral vision of our Holy Father.

In today's Gospel passage Jesus goes into the Decapolis. The Decapolis was a region of ten cities inhabited by a majority of Gentiles, not Jews, during Jesus' time. It was an area strongly influenced by Greek society. When our Lord preaches and performs miracles in the Gentile regions, he is indicating that the Gospel of salvation is intended for all nations and every culture. This is a paradigm for our work of evangelization, which is central to FOCUS. Evangelization was successful in the first generations of the Church because Christians spoke in the "language" of the Greek and Roman cultures. From the example of Jesus and his first disciples, FOCUS tries to make the Gospel understandable within the context of the culture in which we live.

This work of the new evangelization also operates after the model of Jesus' healing of the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. When you go to a Catholic Baptism, you see a ritualized version of this healing. A couple of weeks ago I baptized a baby at the chapel in the Nunciature, and I performed this rite. The priest touches the ears and the mouth of the 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."¹

What's remarkable about this healing by Jesus is the *purpose* for which he performs it – a purpose that is made explicit in the Baptism rite. As liberating as it will be for the man to hear and speak on the *natural* level, Jesus is giving him these faculties so that he can be part of a *supernatural* work: hearing the proclamation of the Kingdom, and proclaiming Jesus to others. This is what FOCUS missionaries, and all Catholics, are empowered by Christ to do. As missionaries of Jesus, we help to "unblock the ears" of people with whom we are sharing the message of God, so that they can hear his voice more distinctly. Then, after what they have heard with their ears penetrates into their hearts, they are able to speak the praise of God to others.

But if we are to do this for the good of others, then we must constantly allow the Lord to do this work to us. We ought never to presume that our hearing of God's true voice is "once and for all", and that, based on that initial hearing, we have all the wisdom we need to proclaim God's message. No. We must return every day to the Author of truth, saying: "Speak, Lord, for your

servant is listening.”² Otherwise, it is easy for us to turn the Gospel into an “idea” that suits our taste or that pleases our friends, but which loses certain elements that are essential.

In the homily of Pope Francis to open the first General Assembly of the Synod in October, he quoted Pope Benedict XVI, who said: “the question for us is this: God has spoken, he has truly broken the great silence, he has shown himself, but how can we communicate this reality to the people of today, so that it becomes salvation?”³ And so Pope Francis said that “the primary task of the Synod [is] to refocus our gaze on God, to be a Church that looks mercifully at humanity.” And this begins when we are a Church “that listens and dialogues”.⁴

At the very opening of the synodal process in 2021 the Pope said:

“Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: Are we good at listening? How good is the ‘hearing’ of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged?”⁵

I hope, then, that these days will be for you a time of *ephphatha* – in other words, a time for your ears to “be opened” to what God is saying to you. What he is saying about his love for people on the peripheries. What he is saying about his love and concern for all of creation (and how beautiful the creation that surrounds us here!). What he is saying about his dream for the Church of today.

“From the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks,” our Lord says.⁶ May he touch our ears to hear his Word, so that we may always speak the fullness of his truth.

¹ Rite of Baptism, *Ephphetha*.

² *1 Samuel* 3:9.

³ *Meditation*, First General Congregation of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 8 October 2012; cited by Pope Francis, Homily at Holy Mass for the Opening of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 4 October 2023.

⁴ Pope Francis, Homily at Holy Mass for the Opening of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 4 October 2023.

⁵ Pope Francis, Homily at Holy Mass for the Opening of the Synodal Path, 10 October 2021.

⁶ *Luke* 6:45.