

**Homily for the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle B
September 8, 2024**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Most if not all of us at one time or another have had an “Aha! Moment”, a time when we suddenly realized something that we previously did not comprehend, or perhaps when our understanding of something suddenly clicked. The Greek scientist Archimedes is said to have experienced a great moment of insight whilst sitting in his bath, which led to him running down the street shouting, “Eureka!” (I have found it!).

In our first reading today (Is 35:4-7a), the prophet Isaiah says that, when the Savior comes, “the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing.” The people who brought a deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus, as we heard in our Gospel passage today from Saint Mark (Mk 7:31-37), would have been aware of this prophecy of Isaiah indicating the signs that will identify the Messiah.

Jesus put His finger into the man's ears and, wetting His finger with His saliva, touched the man's tongue. Saint Mark then gives us the word Jesus spoke in Aramaic, "*Ephphetha!*" – that is, "Be opened!" We are told that immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly."

This would have been the "Aha" or "Eureka" moment for the people who saw this healing. Not only did they witness a miracle, but they realized that Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus was restoring sight to the blind, making the lame walk, opening the ears of the deaf, and enabling the mute to speak. These were all signs of the Messiah, so the people recognized that Jesus was not only a healer and a miracle worker, but He was the Messiah, the Christ sent by God the Father to redeem the world.

In the Order of Baptism of Children, there is an optional prayer said by the priest or deacon called the *Ephphetha* Prayer that is said at the conclusion of the baptism before the final blessing. While touching the newly-baptized child's ears and mouth, he says, "May the Lord Jesus, who made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak, grant that you may soon receive his word with your ears and profess your faith with your lips, to the glory and praise of God the Father."

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to open our ears to hear the Word of God and then speak of our faith so that others may come to believe that Jesus is Our Lord and Savior. We are also called to keep our eyes and ears open to the needs of others.

In this regard, there was a very compelling article in last Friday's edition of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL about the plight of the Jewish people, not just in Israel, but here in the United States and throughout the world. Bearing the title, "The Jews Stand Unbowed—but Alone," the article summarizes an interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy, a Jewish French philosopher and filmmaker, in which he draws attention to one of the six Israeli hostages murdered by Hamas last week, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, age 23. "Hersh was executed for being a Jew," Mr. Lévy says. "He was also American. Where is the collective rage in the U.S.A.? The collective grief? This indifference pains me." Mr. Lévy has met Hersh's parents, "the most resilient, compassionate, freedom-loving Americans." Why, he asks, has the whole country "not rallied to wrap the Goldberg-Polins in their arms and carried them forward in their painful journey of mourning?"

After the attack on Israel by Hamas last year on October 7th, everyone realized "that there is no place in the world where Jews are safe." Before

October 7th, Mr. Levy said, “in the worst hypothesis, if things turned bad for Jews in the West, there was Israel. . . . The shock was that even Israel could be more than unsafe – that it could, alas, be the place where the worst happens.”

The article goes on to say that “There was a second shock. Rather than provoke sympathy and compassion for the Jews, Hamas’s massacre liberated hate. ‘This, for me, was a very big surprise,’ Mr. Lévy says. ‘I expected at least a moment of real solidarity in the face of this enormous crime.’ Instead, the murderers were ‘blessed, excused and praised.’ The victims were ‘accused, cursed and held responsible for their fates.’ Even before Israel’s military response had begun in earnest, there was an ‘explosion of antisemitic demonstrations in New York and on campuses across America.’ Mr. Lévy saw the same in France, which devastated him.”¹

Mr. Lévy rightfully asks about the absence of collective rage and grief in the U.S.A. following the murder of an American citizen by Hamas. As Christians and as Americans, we cannot be blind, deaf, or mute to the plight of our Jewish brothers and sisters. We must condemn the atrocities being committed by Hamas and pray for an end to the violence and antisemitism.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Tunku Varadarajan, “The Jews Stand Unbowed – but Alone: Bernard-Henri Lévy on how Hamas’s Oct. 7 attack changed Israel and the world,” THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, September 5, 2024, accessed online at https://www.wsj.com/opinion/the-jews-stand-unbowedbut-alone-war-amas-hostages-50e5717c?st=q66vu6vyxc35r41&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink.