



HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

Today's readings reflect that echo in the heart of every man—the echo that manifests God, the God that is Love: the God Who calls us to participate of his intimate life. This echo is a longing that has been with us since the creation of the first man.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, distinguishes different moments [throughout salvation history] in this ardent longing—which is a longing for the bodily presence of Christ and union with Him. Today's first reading, from the prophet Isaiah, shows us the first of these moments. It is Isaiah himself, one of the major prophets, who raises his voice and announces: "Take courage. Do not be afraid. Here is your God Who comes to save you."

We might follow St. Bernard, who says that there was, in the men of Isaiah's time, a passionate desire and a devout waiting for the bodily presence of Christ. The people no longer wanted to hear words of the prophet, whose lips are impure. Instead they longed for Him who would speak with pure lips, and Who would kiss them with kisses of his mouth—whereby His beauty, the unction of his joy, and his streams of water (which are his marvelous doctrine) would become a fountain that bursts forth unto eternal life (cf. St. Bernard, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Sermon 2) This longing, this awaiting characteristic of the times of the prophets has its highest realization in our Lord. We see it in the Gospel of St. Mark: Jesus the Word made flesh: Jesus Who goes out and walks, Who goes about the sea of Galilee, Who crosses the region of Decápolis and cures the sick.

As St. John Paul II once said: "Even now Christ continues to walk at our side along the paths of history, the history of each one of us. It is Jesus that comes to pour out his grace in the heart of every man. It is Jesus Who goes out to heal the sick and broken-hearted. It is Jesus Who invites man to receive the kiss of his mouth."

St. Bernard affirms that the living and efficacious word of Jesus is the kiss of his mouth. The saint describes this kiss by saying that it is "the pouring out of a more intimate joy that penetrates unto the deepest of secrets. But especially, it is like a marvelous intercommunion of identity between the Supreme Light and the human spirit that is lit up by Him.

For He Who is in communion with the Lord becomes one spirit with him ... My Jesus surpasses everything in an incomparable way with His form and His beauty. And so I will not beg for kisses of the mouth of anyone else except from Him: neither from an Angel, nor from any human person."

However, in this beautiful and majestic presence of Jesus, that presence that for the people of the Old Testament longed for (and for which our heart continues sighing and longing) can remain hidden and unnoticed.

In the Gospel we read how Jesus cures a man who is deaf and mute by putting His fingers into the man's ears and touching the man's tongue with his saliva. Afterwards, looking to the sky, Jesus sighed and said him: "Effeta", which means "Be opened!"

This encounter with the One for Whom we long, for Whom our very being sighs, Jesus, happens only if we are open. Jesus needs to open us up and pronounce these words over us: "Effetá, Be opened." In fact, these words have become part of the liturgy of Baptism. The priest touches the lips and the ears of the baptized person. He prays that the person may very soon listen to and announce the Word of God. Hear and proclaim the Word of the Lord and, as we said before, together with St. Bernard, this is what it means to be kissed by the lips of His mouth. To experience and enjoy this kiss, on the mouth, open ears are required. Hearing is the first of the senses in Christian spirituality: it is the fundamental attitude of the believer, of the beloved: not only to react to and receive the word of the Lover, but to be always in search of His word, always in a position of active listening, and that, because the Christian knows that he needs this word to live, and that this word is the word that carries him to reach and enjoy eternal life.

And so it is necessary for Jesus to command us: Effetá, be opened. John Paul II commenting on the rite of the baptism teaches that "Effetá", the same command, is now directed to the inner man, so that a man open himself to the divine mysteries, by means of the light of the faith, of love, and of hope. So that he may live more and more intensely the divine life that has been grafted onto his soul by means of Baptism." Jesus comes to open us, to command us to open ourselves and embrace the divine life that He has come to give us.

And when we open our ears to this voice of the Lover, when we hear his voice, then a new way of hearing and perceiving external reality begins: a new way of perceiving man—to perceive man as a gift that comes forth from the hands of God. And so everything is transformed and becomes beautiful—because I have been kissed with the kisses of His mouth, and everything in me is reconciled and enters into a real and perceivable contact with God and with the world.

Now the Lover comes and pronounces, with the priest as his instrument, the words. Hear them: words that transform and make everything beautiful: they transform this bread in His Body and this wine in His Blood. These words make them beautiful, transform them, transubstantiate them.

So upon receiving His words, be silent in your interior and listen to your Beloved, Who speaks to you and tells you “Be opened, ‘effeta’ ... to my passionate love for you, my unique and exclusive love. Leave your occupations and worries and just enter into your interior, open your ears, and hear the voice of the Lover that wants to kiss you with the kisses of his mouth.” Amen.



Father Antonio Maria Cárdenas Lee, ORC was ordained a priest in 2011 for the Order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross and he currently serves preach retreats of Work of the Holy Angels. He is from Colombia, but actually he is living in Mexico. He has attended TOB I: Head & Heart Immersion and TOB II: Into the Deep.

