

Chaplain's Bulletin September 8, 2024



Dear Folks,

The New Testament teaches us a few Aramaic words, including “Ephphatha,” meaning “be opened.” Jesus heals a deaf man with a speech impediment (Mark 7:31-37). When Jesus does a miracle, we first rejoice, and then we ask, “what is He trying to teach us? When most people could not read or write, being unable to hear or speak would severely isolate people. Hearing and speaking connect us to the world beyond ourselves. Sin also isolates people from one another and tends to close us in on ourselves.

Big Question: Is the focus of attention on ourselves or beyond ourselves?

Most of us don't listen as well as we think we do. If I'm focused on myself, I'm filled with: How does this affect me? What does it make me feel? How do I respond to it?

In Ann Garrido's book “Redeeming Conflict” we find habit #2 is “be curious” and habit #3 is “Listen to understand.” We have a tendency to listen to find the flaws and respond. But in the other person's head, what they are thinking makes sense to them. The challenge is to figure out how it makes sense, how do their ideas fit together, and why do they find them compelling? What are the concerns and motivations that drive them? This allows us to speak to their concerns. I know some people have said some things that were true, but did not speak to my premises and concerns, so I found them completely unpersuasive. I found, for example, that since I think there are some problems with the way liturgy has often been celebrated after Vatican II, they assume that I idealize the time before Vatican II, and so they give me a lecture on all the problems of that time. Since they are arguing with a position that I do not believe, it doesn't matter if what they say is true, it accomplishes nothing except get on my nerves and waste my time.

Sometimes I have found myself, to my regret, doing that to someone else. A response bursts out of me before I even think about it instead of hearing them out and maybe asking some questions to draw their thoughts out. This suggests that I was focused more on myself than the other person, and that my need to tell my story had become desperate. It also makes it unlikely that what I say is going to be effective. To become a better listener, I try to quiet myself and focus carefully on the other person. I also work on telling my story. If I don't have another venue, it helps to write, even if I don't share it with anyone. That helps me tell my story in a more controlled manner.

Redeeming conflict habit #5 is welcome emotion, and #6 is tell your story. Once I have listened to the other person, seeking to understand deeply why they think they way they do, I can look at myself and see what I have to tell of what I'm thinking and feeling. I'm more likely to be able to speak in a way that connects. Being a better listener increases my power of speech. I don't claim to be great at it, but I know I'm better than I used to be, and I've connected better with others. I ask Jesus to continue to do for me what He did for the man in the Gospel.

Blessings,
Fr. Jim