

January 28 IV Sunday in Ordinary Time

The common theme of today's readings is Divine authority, as exercised in this world by the prophets of the Old Testament in their messages, by the apostles (including St. Paul), in their writings and teaching in the New Testament, and by Jesus in his teaching and healing ministry. The readings remind us that we should have a "listening heart" (Gospel), instead of a "hardened heart" (Responsorial Psalm) or "divided heart" (Second reading) to welcome the authoritative word of God.

Today's first reading tells us that a true prophet like Moses speaks with authority because it is God Who speaks through him. After the Babylonian exile, the Jewish priests began to interpret the words of Moses given in the first reading, namely, "a prophet like me", as referring to one individual, the expected Messiah. This passage is chosen for today's first reading because it refers to Jesus, the "preacher with authority" mentioned in today's Gospel. The response for today's Responsorial Psalm, (Ps 95), speaks of not hardening our hearts when we hear God's authoritative voice through the Scripture and the Church's teaching authority. In the second reading, St. Paul exercises his God-given authority as the Apostle to the Gentiles to teach people in Corinth that marriage is a holy state ordained by God and that it is a life-long partnership according to the teaching of the Lord. But he opts for, and recommends, celibacy, so that one may serve the Lord without the distractions of married life.

In today's Gospel, Mark describes one sample Sabbath day of Jesus' public life. Jesus joins in public worship in the synagogue as a practicing Jew, heals the sick, drives out evil spirits and prays privately. People immediately notice that Jesus teaches with authority and heals with Divine power. Jesus explains the Scriptures with complete confidence, and when questioned by people, he answers with authority. Jesus is using his real (authentic) Divine authority to teach, empower, liberate, and heal others. In today's Gospel, the evil spirit recognizes and loudly declares Jesus as the Messiah. By his simple, if harsh, command, "Be quiet! Come out of him" Jesus exorcises the demon who departs, obedient to His Divine authority.

1) Let us approach Jesus for liberation: Jesus did not use his authority and Divine power to rule and control people. He came to set people free. Hence, let us approach Jesus with trusting Faith so that he may free us from the evil spirits that keep us from praying and prevent us from loving and sharing our blessings with others. Let us approach Jesus with trusting Faith so that he may free us from all the "evil spirits" of fear,

compulsions, selfishness, anger, resentment and hostility. Jesus says “I have come that they may have life, life in abundance” (Jn 10:10). So Jesus should be a source of liberation for us. May Jesus free us from all those spirits which make us deaf, dumb, blind, lame, and paralyzed, physically and spiritually. Through Word and Sacrament, Jesus brings that power to us and says the same words to the demons in our life, “Be gone” -- not just once but as often as we need to hear them, until finally, we are free from these demons entirely. Christ has power over any demon, so whether those demons be addictions, heartaches, secret sins -- whatever our chains may be -- Christ can set us free and longs to do so.

2) We need to use our God-given authority to build up lives. No doubt we can think back to people who have made a lasting impression on our lives – either for good or bad. Perhaps it was a grandparent, an uncle, or a parent, who loved us and cared for us. Perhaps it was a Sunday school teacher who encouraged us in our Faith and exerted a positive impact on our lives. Perhaps we remember the kindness as well as the firm discipline that a schoolteacher gave us. On the other hand, there may be people in our past whom we remember with pain and discomfort.

Are children learning something from us as parents that will stand them in good stead for the future? We want our children to grow into strong, wise, confident, capable, mature adults. But we want more than that. We want them to grow in their Faith, to accept Jesus as their Lord and personal Savior. We want children to see in us the love of Jesus and how our Christian Faith affects our lives. A good question for parents, teachers and all of us is: “In what way am I helping the children I know grow in wonder at Jesus and his love for them?” When God’s Word and God’s ways are taught and spoken about with authority – with conviction – our children (and others) will see in them, with amazement, God’s love for them in His Son Jesus.

3) We need teachers who know how to use their authority properly: Teachers are powerful because they change lives. They have within their grasp the power over young lives to hurt them terribly or heal them wonderfully. Most of us are deeply and forever indebted to some caring teacher in our past. Some people never get over the damage done to them by some cruel or uncaring teacher. So today, when we hear that Jesus entered the synagogue at Capernaum and began to teach, we need to take note: Jesus was a teacher. Let us all become good teachers and use our authority to mold young lives in the right path.