

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Theme: Jesus Speaks and Teaches with Authority

Jesus Christ, unlike the scribes who always begin their teaching or preaching first by quoting authority figures, Jesus speaks and teaches with authority, not quoting earthly authority figures. His authority, as Mark tells us in the Gospel reading today, impressed his audience: "The people were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority and not as the Scribes." Yes, God the Son does not need any human authority figures to authenticate his teachings or preaching. He derived his authority from his heavenly Father who is always at work with him, as Jesus himself often reminds us. Jesus' teachings and preaching with authority reminds me of this saying: "There is no authority like the authority of the one who has lived what he is saying." I do believe because Jesus lived what he said and taught, he won the admiration of many of his followers during his earthly ministry. Although Jesus died two thousand years ago, his preaching and teaching continue to impress many people. That explained why he has the greatest number of followers than any founder of a religion in the world.

St. Mark portrays Jesus as powerful both in deeds and words throughout Jesus' public ministry. The words of the man with unclean spirit, who calls Jesus the holy one of God, should not be seen as a confession but his attempt to ward off Jesus' power. In the ancient world, there was a notion that the use of the precise name of an opposing spirit would guarantee you a mastery over him/her. Jesus, being God the Son, was able to overcome the unclean/evil spirit in this man and healed him. Beloved, there is a healing power. Remember what St. Paul tells in his letter to the Philippians: "So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). This encounter between Jesus and the unclean spirit also teaches us that evil forces can be present even in the assembly of God's people. This man with the unclean spirit came to Jesus and was healed. We also need Jesus to heal us of our "unclean spirits" – jealousy, envy, drunkenness, gossiping, laziness etc.

Moses, knowing that he would not be with his people forever, promised them that God will raise a prophet like him for them. He gave them a message of hope and comfort. With all that is happening in our world today, we also need a message of hope and comfort. The perfect person to give true hope and comfort is Jesus Christ. Please continue to turn to him and you will never be disappointed. It is interesting to know that for the early Christian community of St. Mark, Jesus Christ is the prophet Moses foretold. St. Mark wants future Christians also to know that the prophecy of Moses found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the prophet par excellence. Jesus Christ is the greatest prophet who has had lived in this world. Through our baptism, he has empowered us also continue his prophetic role in the world. By the virtue of our baptism, we share in Jesus' prophetic role. It means we must stand for the truth and only say/teach what is in accordance with the Gospel. Are we truly exercising this prophetic role Jesus bestowed on us during baptism for the better glory of God?

Today we hear another difficult passage of St. Paul in the second reading. Paul is not saying that married couples can't completely dedicate themselves to the service of God. His main message here is this: let nothing distract you from serving God alone. Paul himself was celibate but never imposed his celibacy on the churches he founded. However, he urges everyone, especially those who are celibate, to give their undivided attention to God.

As we celebrate National Catholic Schools Week this week from January 28 to February 28, let us thank God for the gift of our Catholic Schools. We salute our Catholics teachers, faculties, and the entire Catholic School community. We ask God's abundant blessings upon you all.

Let us continue to pray that what we say/teach with our lips, we may truly believe with our hearts and praise/glorify Jesus Christ with our lives. May Mother Mary and her beloved husband St. Joseph continue to intercede for us as we continue the mission that their beloved Son Jesus Christ has entrusted to us. Amen