

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the sabbath came he went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.

In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit and it shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant. 'Here is a teaching that is new' they said 'and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

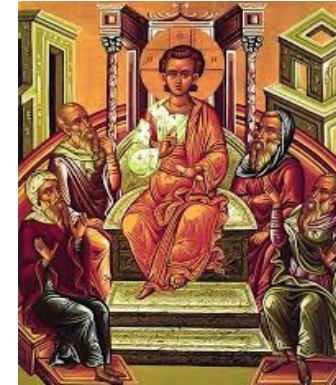
The people of Capernaum recognise Jesus who had come to their synagogue as a teacher, and not just another teacher but a teacher who was very different to the teachers they had grown used to, the scribes, the experts in the Jewish Law. His teaching, we are told, 'made a deep impression on people, because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.' The people in the synagogue exclaimed, 'Here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it.' This journey of Jesus to the synagogue where he taught with authority and healed a man with an unclean spirit is the first public act of Jesus in Mark's gospel. According to Mark, Jesus first appeared on the scene as an authoritative teacher, as someone whose teaching, whose word, could deliver people from their demons, from the forces that were oppressing them and leaving them diminished as human beings.

Jesus was recognised as a person of authority because of the word that he spoke and the impact for good of that word on others. This is why we confess Jesus not just as our teacher but as our Lord. We are happy to submit to his authority, to his lordship, because we recognise that in doing so we will have life to the full, and, like the man in the gospel, be freed of those spirits that prevent us from becoming the person God created us to be.

Fourth Sunday

Year B

31st January 2021



This Sunday is a day of Special Prayer for Racial Justice. Every day we see or hear of stories of those who have suffered at the hands of others, on account of the colour of their skin, their beliefs or their ethnicity. Let us pray:

Father, bless us as we strive to find our way to true racial reconciliation. Open our eyes to all that goes on around us that contribute to racial injustice. Grant us the knowledge to understand all that we do, both personally and as a society, which prevents us from recognising and defending the dignity of all or our brothers and sisters, and especially at this time, our brothers and sisters of colour who are now feeling so much pain. Grant us the grace to reflect on our own actions and inactions that contribute to this pain. And grant us the strength to take action to alleviate this pain and to end racial injustice in all its forms. Amen

Opening Prayer

*Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honour you with all our mind,
and love everyone in truth of heart.*

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

Moses said to the people: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like myself, from among yourselves, from your own brothers; to him you must listen. This is what you yourselves asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the Assembly. "Do not let me hear again" you said "the voice of the Lord my God, nor look any longer on this great fire, or I shall die"; and the Lord said to me, "All they have spoken is well said. I will raise up a prophet like yourself for them from their own brothers; I will put my words into his mouth and he shall tell them all I command him. The man who does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name, shall be held answerable to me for it. But the prophet who presumes to say in my name a thing I have not commanded him to say, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'"

The book of Deuteronomy reiterates the Law of Moses to a new generation of Israelites who were soon to enter the promised land following their long, 40-year wanderings in the wilderness. Here, Moses speaks of Jesus, who would be the ultimate prophet, through whom God would speak his words of salvation. In the same way that Moses was the first and most important prophet, who brought his people out of the land of Egypt and through whom God spoke during their long history, so the coming prophet would be the fulfilment of God's plan of redemption.

Pope Francis explained: "As Moses had covenanted with God by virtue of the law received on Mount Sinai, so Jesus, from a hill on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, gives to his disciples and to the crowd a new lesson which begins with the Beatitudes. Moses gives the Law on Mount Sinai and Jesus, the new Moses, gives the Law on that hillside, on the shore of the Lake of Galilee."

Psalm 94(95):1-2,6-9

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord; hail the rock who saves us.

Let us come before him, giving thanks, with songs let us hail the Lord.

Come in; let us bow and bend low; let us kneel before the God who made us: for he is our God and we the people who belong to his pasture, the flock that is led by his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice! 'Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the desert when your fathers put me to the test; when they tried me, though they saw my work.'

1 Corinthians 7: 32-35

I would like to see you free from all worry. An unmarried man can devote himself to the Lord's affairs, all he need worry about is pleasing the Lord; but a married man has to bother about the world's affairs and devote himself to pleasing his wife: he is torn two ways. In the same way an unmarried woman, like a young girl, can devote herself to the Lord's affairs; all she need worry about is being holy in body and spirit. The married woman, on the other hand, has to worry about the world's affairs and devote herself to pleasing her husband. I say this only to help you, not to put a halter round your necks, but simply to make sure that everything is as it should be, and that you give your undivided attention to the Lord.

Here, Paul simply recognises that when a person doesn't have family responsibilities, they are more 'free' to serve God. This was the main reason Paul considered the unmarried state preferable for himself. Paul does not say this to condemn the married person; in fact, Paul is saying this is how it should be for the married person. There is something wrong if a married man does not care for how he may please his wife, and something is wrong if a married woman does not care about how she may please her husband. For Paul, being unmarried meant fewer distractions in serving God. What Paul is doing here is introducing a new way of human life, an alternate form of life unknown in the world before Christ—the life of consecrated celibacy. We call it today the "religious life." This is the life of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It is the life that priests and consecrated religious live. It is the life that St. Paul himself lived.

Alleluia, Alleluia! Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to mere children. Alleluia!

Prayer after Communion

Nourished by these redeeming gifts, we pray, O Lord, that through this help to eternal salvation our faith may ever increase.