**4th Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**Cycle B**

**Deuteronomy 18: 15-20**

**1 Corinthians 7: 32-35**

**Mark 1: 21-28**

**Theme: What does God’s Divine Authority mean in my life?**

The common theme of today’s readings is divine authority reflected by the prophets of the Old Testament in their messages, by the apostles including St. Paul in the New Testament in their writings and teaching, and by Jesus in his teaching and healing ministry.

Today’s first reading tells us that a true prophet speaks with authority because it is God who speaks through him. The Book of Deuteronomy is written as Moses’s Farewell Address to the Israelites. Moses was about to die. The Chosen People were terrified because they were about to lose the person who had been successfully leading them through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, and they were also losing the prophet who had been keeping them informed of Yahweh's will. When he died, how would they find out what God wanted of them? God answered the question by promising Moses that He would heed the people’s request and “raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and … put My words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.” The text was first seen as promising that there would be a line of prophets to interpret previous revelations by God and to add some new ones for each generation. After the return from the Babylonian exile (c. 538 B. C.), the Jewish priests and prophets began to interpret this text of Deuteronomy as referring to one individual, namely the Messiah who was to come. It was to be the Messiah that this Divine Authority was to rest in. The New Testament followed this interpretation and saw these words of dying Moses "*a prophet like me"* verified in Christ (Acts 3: 22 - Peter; 7: 37 - Stephen).

In today’s gospel, Mark describes one sample Sabbath day of Jesus’ public life. He joins in public worship in the synagogue as a practicing Jew, he heals the sick, and He drives out evil spirits. The synagogue service consisted of three parts--prayer, the reading of God's word, and the exposition of it made by anyone who wished to do so. Jesus was apparently invited to proclaim the Scripture and teach. People immediately noticed that Jesus spoke with authority. Neither Mark nor any of the other Gospel writers, tell us what Scripture Jesus may have read or preached about in Capernaum. It almost seems as if “how” He spoke was more important to the people than what He said. Jesus always spoke with authority because He was Authority!

While in the synagogue, Jesus is confronted by a man in attendance that has an unclean spirit. The unclean spirit confronts Jesus with the words, “what do you want with us (“what business do we have with each other”), Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.” The one least expected to know who Jesus is KNOWS; those who might be expected to know have no clue! It was believed that in order to gain control over an evil spirit, all one had to do was to call out its true identity and it would magically disappear. The demon tried to use that trick to gain control over Jesus. Jesus, however, prevails. Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit with the words, “Be quiet! Come out of him.” The people present were “astonished!”

Jesus exhibits authority never before experienced. Jesus’ teaching was also threatening to some (scribes, Pharisees), and frightening to others (sinners, unclean spirits). Later on when the religious leaders began contesting His teaching, they pointed out that Jesus was just a carpenter from Nazareth. They said, “Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us”? “And they took offense at Him.” (Mark 6: 3). This harkens back to the first reading which gives us the criteria for discerning whether someone was speaking on behalf of God as a Prophet. Jesus passed the test (with flying colors), but the religious leaders failed to hold up their end of the bargain. They refused to listen to the words of the Prophet!

How do we relate to Jesus’ “teaching with authority?” The Catholic Church derives her teaching authority from her founder Jesus. We should derive great comfort in knowing that what we believe comes from the Divine Authority of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus did not use his authority and divine power to rule and control people. He cameto liberate people. Neither does Mother Church. Jesus “desired for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:4).” The Gospel was (and is) the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. As such, it is to be proclaimed to all nations and individuals. In keeping with the Lord’s command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways: orally and in writing.

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors with their own position of teaching authority. This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called “Tradition”, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, “the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.

The task of giving authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone, the Magisterium (bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome). The written scriptures, the oral Tradition, and the Magisterium constitute the Deposit fo Faith. 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.

One more point to be made about today’s Gospel! Put yourself in the place of the man that had the unclean spirit. Mark tells us nothing about the man. Was he a regular attendee who knew he had the unclean spirit and was praying to God for deliverance? How long had the spirit tormented him? If so, had he suffered alone? Had anyone in the synagogue known of his unclean spirit, he would have been declared unclean and forbidden from entering the synagogue. Or, perhaps he was a regular attendee and didn’t know he had the unclean spirit. Because the spirit knew who Jesus was, maybe the spirit chose that day to reveal himself. Regardless, we can consider two points concerning the man’s situation. First of all, God used him to reveal an important truth about His son, Jesus. St. Augustine wrote the following, “For almighty God, because He is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if He were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself. From the greatest moral evil ever committed, the rejection and murder of God’s only Son, caused by the sins of all men, God, by his grace that abounded all the more, brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption.”

Secondly, we never know what the person praying next to us in the pew is experiencing in their life. Let us be mindful of God’s authority in our own life, but let us also be mindful of God’s presence in those around us. How we love each other is the ultimate test and sign of the effectiveness of God’s authority in our own life.