

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 28, 2018

When I read this week's gospel I really saw the beginnings of Jesus' authority as a leader. The readings are from Mark and describe Jesus teaching at Capernaum. Verse 22 really spoke to me when "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Fortunately, I know who Jesus is so I had to step back and put myself in the shoes (sandals) of the audience. When they say he spoke "as one having authority" back then they did not know who Jesus was, but it didn't take them long to figure things out.

A man with an "unclean spirit" approached and confronted Jesus. He asked Jesus, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Jesus commanded the spirit to come out of him and was successful in quieting the spirit. Everyone in attendance was amazed that Jesus could command even the spirits. Note that there is no pause between the confrontation by the man and Jesus taking action. There was no grand-standing here nor did Jesus ask for everyone's attention to make sure they saw what he was doing. Jesus took immediate action and in the words of Mark, "They were all amazed". The action spoke for itself and as the reading states his fame began to spread through the region.

The word authority comes from the Latin word *auctoritas* which essentially translates to creator. The word author also comes from this word. Our politicians have authority we have given them and they create or author laws. Our law enforcement then is given the authority to police those laws. This authority can be removed via election or removal from office for a politician (it's a stretch but maybe misuse of authority) or in the case of law enforcement they retire. This power transitions from one person to the next. Jesus' authority comes from God and cannot be removed. We share in this authority when we are confirmed. We maintain this authority when we attend weekly mass.

Jesus had all of the authority in the universe but chose not to use it like the rest of man used the small amounts of authority afforded to him. All of us can name many instances from history where authority was either abused or misused. Jesus could have had guards at the door to keep this man out or He could easily have had him removed from the temple. Isn't it better to deal with these situations? Where else have we seen examples of keeping problems hidden so we don't have to deal with them? Could we put a "wall" around other problems to keep them from being in our line of sight and keeping us from having to deal with them?

Brian Stenke