

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### January 28, 2018 Cycle B

**Opening prayer:** *Loving and caring God, you send messengers like Moses, Paul and Jesus to speak your divine Word to us. Give us ears to hear your Word and strength to act on it. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Sharing life:** How did you experience God's presence and activity in your life last week?

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** Jesus as teacher and prophet is the fulfillment of today's first reading. In the second reading, Paul encourages his readers to be ready for Christ's Second Coming by living a Christ-centered life. The readings today bid us to *listen* to the voice of the messengers whom God sends to us.

Consider reading the commentary before or after each Scripture reading.

#### FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell speech to his people before they enter the Promised Land. He will not go with them. He consoles his people by telling them that God will raise a prophet like Moses and he will speak through him: "*I will put my words into his mouth (Dt. 18:18)*". The promise of a future prophet led the Israelites down through the centuries to wonder whether or not a particular individual might in fact be this promised prophet. The early Christians saw Jesus and his ministry as fulfillment of Moses' prophecy (Living the Word, Cycle B 2012).

#### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 95

The people's response to the prophetic word must be one of total acceptance.

#### SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 7:32-35

If one is unaware of the context of today's reading, one may conclude that Paul, a celibate and unmarried man, is saying that married life is inferior to a life of celibacy. But Paul is *not* saying that. When he was writing his letter to the Corinthians, he believed Jesus' Second Coming was imminent. In this context, Paul is saying that planning a lifelong marriage was not a good idea. One would be better served to focus on spiritual things, to focus on being ready to receive the Lord when he comes. While Paul knows from personal experience, that his single state allows him to be more focused on the things of God, he is *not* saying that the married state is inferior to a life of celibacy. Paul is more concerned with the quality of one's commitment than with a particular state in life.

#### GOSPEL: Mark 1:21-28

Having called a handful of disciples, Jesus begins his teaching and healing ministry. Mark notes how impressed the people are with Jesus. They are spellbound by him. He teaches with authority unlike their own religious leaders. What is this authority? It is the authority of God. Like the prophets of old, Jesus is anointed with God's Spirit, which enables him to touch people's hearts. His teaching is accompanied by signs and wonders. When Jesus teaches, things happen: the sick are healed, the crippled walk, and the oppressed are liberated. All of this leaves the people in awe.

Also in today's gospel, Jesus begins his battle with the "powers of darkness"—which will be a central part of his mission. Here Jesus defeats Satan. He bids him to leave the man. In so doing, Jesus not only shows compassion for the troubled person, but he also announces the beginning of the messianic era and the Reign of God. The Gospel builds on the first reading: Jesus is seen as the prophet whom Moses spoke about. He is a prophet in word and in deed. He is the living oracle of God. Mark uses this story to teach and encourage his community 30 or 40 years later. They are experiencing "hostile forces" in their persecution by Jewish leaders and the Romans. If their lives are firmly rooted in Christ, they will be able to withstand the evil forces attacking them.

#### FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. What can cause you or others to harden your hearts against God and his Word?

3. In the second reading, Paul speaks about the anxieties that can distract us from following the Lord. Name some of these anxieties and what we can do about them.

4. What are some of the “unclean spirits” that can inhabit our lives and our world today? What are some ‘demons’ that keep people in bondage today?

5. What is Jesus saying to you in the gospel about how a Christian disciple should act?

### **RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD**

Name one way you can act on today’s readings.  
Suggestion: Be aware of how God wants to use you this week to be his messenger in the world.

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

Pray for church leaders as they seek God’s will concerning the shortage of priests today.

**Save the Date!!**  
**Saturday, March 10, 2018**  
**Annual Day of Reflection**  
by the Space Coast Alliance of  
Small Christian Communities with  
Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,  
The Wild Goose Is Loose!