

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 31, 2021 B

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**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.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** In the First Reading, Moses tells his people that God will raise up a prophet like him whom the people will listen to. In the Second Reading, Paul, believing that the Second Coming is near, says that this is not a good time to enter into marriage. In the Gospel, we witness the two main components of Jesus' Ministry: teaching and healing.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 1-2, 8-19

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses's 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 has 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 the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy. Jesus' teaching is given with authority and confirmed by miracles (as we see in today's Gospel), the sign that God is with him.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM: 95

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

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

One unenlightened in the context of today's reading may conclude that Paul, a celibate and unmarried man, believes that married life is inferior to celibate life. But Paul is *not* saying that. When writing his letter to the Corinthians, he tells them that as Jesus' Second Coming is imminent, planning a lifelong marriage is not a good idea. One would be better served to focus on spiritual things, on being ready to receive the Lord

when he comes. Paul knows from personal experience that his single state allows him to be more focused on the things of God, but by no means is he saying that the married state is inferior to a life of celibacy. Paul is more concerned with the quality of one's commitment to God than with a particular state in life.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:21-28

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

### 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. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Who 'speaks with authority' in your life? Whose witness to the Gospel inspires you?
3. Who or what are some inner demons or voices that can inhabit our lives? What helps you to deal with them?
4. Have you experienced Jesus' healing, love and mercy in your life? If so, in what ways?
5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

### JOURNALING

*Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it; take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### PRAYING WITH THE WORD

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Help me to hear your Word, to discern and to decide how I need to respond to it in my life.*

### RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Seek to be aware of evil forces that may seek to distract you from being focused on following the ways of Jesus.

### CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

**Facilitator:** What are you grateful for? For what and for whom do you wish to pray?

### CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*Father, you have given us Jesus  
to show us your face in our daily lives.  
Open our eyes to the familiar and surprising ways  
that he heals us and empowers us each day.  
May your Holy Spirit help us to expel  
all that is evil and impure in our lives,  
all that is opposed to you and your ways.  
This we pray through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.*