

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
JANUARY 31, 2021**

SCRIPTURES:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Mark 1:21-28

Moses challenges Israel to listen to God's voice.

We must live up to our vocation.

We are called to hear the voice of Jesus.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Mark:

This Gospel always lets the actions of Jesus speak as loudly, if not more loudly, than his words. The deeds are themselves teachings as to who Jesus is. Jesus works with the authority and power of God; therefore...! In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is presented as a teacher, but unlike Matthew and Luke, it is not so much the content of the teaching but the power of the works of Jesus that is reported. The works of Jesus are effective. For example, the exorcism of the person possessed by an unclean spirit demonstrates that the power of evil is being overcome in Jesus Christ.

The "Holy One" in Jewish Scriptures refers to God, usually. In Psalm 16:10, it is used in reference to a human being. When used for Jesus, it means that he is the one who uniquely reveals the power of God working through him.

The Gospel of Mark is divided in halves (1:1 to 8:26 and 8:27 to the end.) In the first half, Jesus reveals himself in parables and in divinely empowered deeds. Then, at Caesarea Philippi, Peter proclaims what the whole community of faith now needs to know and to testify: Jesus is the Messiah! But Jesus needs to be recognized for what he does (the works of God) rather than for who he is. In the Bible, *deeds* are the proof of who a person is. One who teaches with *authority* is one like Moses. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus sits on a mountain to teach, as Moses did. Here it is claimed that he has authority. Authority comes from God. The unclean spirits respond to him. Who but God can direct those spirits that have rebelled against him? He is a prophet like Moses.

But he is more than Moses. He has become the *incarnate image of God himself*. Evil spirits obey him, though he is not evil himself. The reign of God has become present in him because he can overcome the Evil one.

The *synagogue* was the place where the teaching of God's law took place. There were no priests here. Laity ran the synagogue. They were not bound by the requirements of Temple worship. Jesus was not of the priestly class. He was very much at home in synagogues. He is the Holy One promised in the Book of Deuteronomy. The demons recognize who he was. He is a prophet like

Moses. His authority is not derived from texts that other people have written. He derives his authority from God, a Prophet.

Let us not be too quick to claim that he is equal to the Father here.

Deuteronomy:

This book presents itself as a farewell address given by Moses as the people of God are about to enter the Promised Land. The word means “Second Law Book.” It is as if Moses were giving the law once more, since the people will now not have him to mediate between them and God. The word of God will be a sign of God’s presence in the midst of the people. A great prophet *like Moses* will speak God’s word again to a new people. The Christian community came to see this passage as a promise of the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians:

St. Paul continues the discussion on the urgency of working for the kingdom of God. Marriage may be a distraction from that work. Paul, of course, communicates his own sense of mission with its unique focus on Christ. He wishes that all Christians could be so single-minded. In other places, he will speak most highly of marriage: the great “mystery” (sacrament) that is a living sign of Christ’s love for the Church. Here, for the Corinthians at this time in history, there should be no division of spiritual energy. Celibacy, as undivided commitment, is urged for them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What authority does the word of God have in your parish? Does it have first priority, second priority, or none at all? What could give the word of God more authority? What can you and your family (or group) do to grant more authority to the word of God? How can you enhance the word of the Gospel so that people will recognize it as the word of Christ who speaks through the Church?

2. What authority do the teachings of the Church (or doctrine) have in your life? Do you recognize the infallible teachings of the Church as coming from Christ himself? Do you recognize the teachings of the *catechism* as the official teachings of the Church? How do you distinguish between infallible teachings and everything else in the *catechism*? (If you don't know the answer, ask the parish priest or the catechetical leader in your parish.)

3. Have you prayed over the word of God and over Church teachings, asking God to grant you discernment and understanding? Has prayer ever helped you to know what God wants from you? Do you think that God will leave you in the dark as to what his will is for you?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Find out who is responsible for preparing the Intercessions or Prayers of the Faithful to be used at the weekend Masses in your parish. Ask that they include an intercession for knowing what God’s will is for the parish in the coming week.

PRAYER

**Lord, let me know what your will is
for me.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

One of the glories of the Catholic Church is that it claims to be a teacher in the name of Christ. This teaching mission of the Church is also a stumbling block for so many people. Some believe this; others deny it. Many people come to the Catholic Church because this Church claims to be able to speak in the name of Christ and to be able to proclaim without failing what Christ proclaimed. Others say this is preposterous. Who can speak for Christ?

Jesus said to his disciples, “He who hears you hears me” (Luke 10: 16). There can be no doubt that Jesus commissioned his Church to be a teacher in his name. The Church speaks as Christ would speak to the people of our day. The teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ for us now.

There are persons who do not accept the authority of the Church in the teachings of Christ. Some, like Protestants who get their teachings only from the Bible, do not believe that the Church can speak for Christ. These persons do not accept that the Church can and does speak for Christ.

The infallibility of the Church depends on this promise that Christ appointed his disciples to speak in his name. Church leaders are the ones who speak in his name. I do not claim this authority. But the Church at large does claim this authority. When the bishops speak with the consent of the pope, the Church speaks. When the pope speaks with full authority as the unique spokesperson for the Church, the Church speaks.

Infallibility does not mean that the Church does not make mistakes. The Church does. But, infallibility means that the Church teaches what Christ wants it to teach for our salvation. Nothing that the Church teaches officially can lead us astray.

“Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Matthew 18:18-20).

The apostles went forth and proclaimed the Good News of Christ, even to the point of laying down their lives for him. This was their first and primary task. No other function or ministry has priority over this one. “Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).

As the apostles went to the world, they appointed others who would follow them in this ministry.

The Catechism: #888-892

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