

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

There is, as we know, a huge difference between power and authority. A bully in the playground may well have the power to intimidate, but has no authority to do so. Anyone who has lived under a military or oppressive regime know that power is associated with force, compulsion and violence, the one thing that is lacking for people in this situation is freedom. People rightly oppose this type of power that exploits and manipulates. Power without authority always looks dangerous and usually has disastrous consequences for people denied the human rights we take for granted.

In today's gospel passage we meet Jesus and his disciples in the synagogue on the Sabbath where he began to teach. And then we read, 'And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.' From where did Jesus get this authority, a question that is frequently asked by the religious leaders of his day? The first reading from Deuteronomy gives us a clue, when God speaking through Moses says, 'I will raise up a prophet like yourself for them from their brothers. I will put my words into his mouth and he shall tell them what I command.' Jesus authority does not come from any human source, and therefore no human source can take it from him. Jesus authority comes from his Father, who acknowledged him as his beloved Son and who poured out the Holy Spirit on him at his baptism.

And then we see Jesus authority in action, as we will throughout the gospel as his word brings healing to the blind and the deaf, the lame and the dumb. In our passage today Jesus action takes place within the context of a confrontation between the power of good and the power of darkness. We might be a little unsettled by the idea of someone being possessed by an unclean spirit, but if we think of this man as not being free, unable to take charge of his own life, perhaps due to illness, addiction, fear or whatever, it might bring us into our own day. Jesus word is effective, whatever is enslaving the man leaves him when Jesus says, 'Be quiet! Come out of him.' The response from those present is, 'Here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it.' Jesus uses his authority for good, to free people from those things which dominate their lives and keep them enslaved. Jesus uses his authority to empower people to live differently, to leave behind whatever had left them unfree, and to enable them to make the right choices in their lives.

This use of authority for good is seen in our own time in people like Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, the Maryknoll sisters and many others. The powers of Darkness tried to eradicate them by assassination, but their influence lives on. Their moral authority exercised on behalf of those suffering from violence, racism, injustice, oppression, prejudice and so much more, made them forces for good. And that is what we are called to be, not alone, but shaped by the families and communities to which we belong, and inspired, yes, by those who have gone before us, but ultimately by Jesus himself who accepted death rather than compromise his mission.

Bidding Prayers for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Celebrant:

Seeking to be free from all that keeps us from God, we turn to God in prayer for our needs and the needs of the world.

Reader:

For the Church – that those in authority will use it with courage and compassion as they seek to meet the needs of the people they serve, especially the most troubled.

Lord in your mercy

For our political leaders – that they will use the authority invested in them by the office they hold to uphold the rights of all people and to put forward policies that will bring people together rather than divide them.

Lord in your mercy

For all those who are possessed by demons of any sort, especially those of addiction – that they may be freed from their turmoil and lead a more peaceful life.

Lord in your mercy

For all those who are suffering from conditions which affect the memory or the mind – that they, and those who care for them, will receive the support they need.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the current pandemic, and Brian Wildman, Fr James McManus MSC, Wilfred Mills, Tracey Kehoe, Molly Robinson, Irene Riley, Edmund Hall and Simon Worrall whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God, you sent your Son to be our Saviour with authority to cast out demons and to heal the world in your name. Grant your Church the compassionate heart needed to see those troubled among us and to reach out with possibilities for transformation. Make us agents of conversion for our world, through Christ our Lord. Amen