



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 28, 2024**

Theme: "He taught them as one who had authority."

Gathering Prayer

All: Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:21-28

²¹They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²²The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ²⁴"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" ²⁵"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." ²⁸News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Gospel Focus

People are astonished at Jesus teaching; his authority contrasts sharply with the way the scribes have been teaching. Parenting experts would like to make a distinction between authoritarian vs authoritative parenting. Authoritarian parents are strict and cold; they strive to control their children, expect obedience without question and mete out punishment for noncompliance. Authoritative parents are also strict, but they set boundaries with warmth and compassion and involve their children in decision making. Their work is slower—it takes longer to explain the rules than to simply set them—but putting in this time sets them up for a parental authority based on trust rather than on fear. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, we get a hint of which kind of authority Jesus will exert. He will set boundaries and declare difficult moral teachings, but he is able to do so because his authority is based on love.

Gospel Reflection

Prophets. You either hate them or love them. There is no lukewarm or neutral response to their

incisive message. When a prophet's words challenge unjust systems and liberate folks who have been oppressed, those set free sing the praises of the prophet. However, those whose power, privilege, and status are threatened by the prophet's words and actions will do all they can to silence them.

In today's first reading, the Israelites have prayed for a prophet like Moses, and God promised to raise up another such leader. They want one from among their midst who is deeply prayerful and close to God, who will know and convey God's desires, and who can lead the people out of their enslavements and their desert desolation. Moses assures them their prayer is heard. As Israel's history continues, many prophets arise. They are not confined to those whose words and deeds are recorded in the Scripture.

In our own day, it is easy to identify prophets like Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr etc, because each died for their prophetic witness. They are also everyday prophets whose difficult and agitating work for justice never comes into spotlight. They know that trouble will surely come alongside any triumph of justice. The trouble can come not only from outside opponents, but even from within one's community of faith. When St Mary MacKillop (1842-1909), founder of the Sisters of St Joseph in Australia, was building communities of sisters who would teach in schools and care for orphans, everyone lauded her. However, once she turned her critical eye on an abusive situation in the church itself, she found herself excommunicated.

In the gospel, we see Jesus acclaimed as the promised "prophet of Moses," who teaches with authority and power to cast out unclean spirits. While at first people respond with amazement and wonder, they will quickly turn on him as the gospel progresses, as his challenging message upsets the status quo. To ask for such a prophet is not only to ask for a leader who will confront unjust forces external to the faith community but also that we ourselves be confronted by the prophet's searing ability to speak the truth.

We might think from today's second reading that such prophetic figures come only from the ranks of celibate believers. Paul depicts married people as being more anxious about pleasing their spouses and worldly affairs than godly concerns. To a certain extent, the notion that those who are vowed to celibacy are more single-minded toward God has persisted through the ages. But the Second Vatican Council insists that all disciples are equally called to holiness and to mission. It is precisely through engagement with the concerns of the world, the council tells us, that Jesus' followers exercise their discipleship. In a sense, all followers of Jesus are called to exercise a prophetic ministry like Moses and Jesus. The readings today invite us not only to pray for prophetic leaders but also to exercise our own prophetic gifts both within and outside our faith communities.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Deuteronomy 18:15-20

¹⁵ Moses said to the people: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like myself, from among yourselves, from your own brothers; to him you must listen. ¹⁶ This is what you yourselves asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the Assembly. "Do not let me hear again" you said "the voice of the Lord my God, nor look any longer on this great fire, or I shall die"; ¹⁷ and the Lord said to me, "All they have spoken is well said. ¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet like yourself for them from their own brothers; I will put my words into his mouth and he shall tell them all I command him. ¹⁹ The man who does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name, shall be held answerable to me for it. ²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to say in my name a thing I have not commanded him to say, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'"

Responsorial Psalm — Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9

R: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us acclaim the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him. **(R)**

Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides. **(R)**

Oh, that today you would hear his voice: "Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the desert, where your fathers tempted me; they tested me though they had seen my works." **(R)**

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

³² I would like to see you free from all worry. An unmarried man can devote himself to the Lord's affairs, all he need worry about is pleasing the Lord; ³³ but a married man has to bother about the world's affairs and devote himself to pleasing his wife: he is torn two ways. ³⁴ In the same way an unmarried woman, like a young girl, can devote herself to the Lord's affairs; all she need worry about is being holy in body and spirit. The married woman, on the other hand, has to worry about the world's affairs and devote herself to pleasing her husband. ³⁵ I say this only to help you, not to put a halter round your necks, but simply to make sure that everything is as it should be, and that you give your undivided attention to the Lord.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

438. Jesus' messianic consecration reveals his divine mission, "for the name 'Christ' implies 'he who anointed', 'he who was anointed' and 'the very anointing with which he was anointed'. The one who anointed is the Father, the one who was anointed is the Son, and he was anointed with the Spirit who is the anointing." (St. Irenaeus, Adv. haeres. 3,18,3: PG 7/1, 934) His eternal messianic consecration was revealed during the time of his earthly life at the moment of his baptism by John, when "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power", "that he might be revealed to Israel" (Acts 10:38; Jn 1:31) as its Messiah. His works and words will manifest him as "the Holy One of God". (Mk 1:24; Jn 6:69; Acts 3:14)

1673. When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism. Jesus performed exorcisms and from him the Church has received the power and office of exorcizing. (Cf. Mk 1:25-26; 3:15; 6:7, 13; 16:17) In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of Baptism. The solemn exorcism, called "a major exorcism," can be performed only by a priest and with the permission of the bishop. The priest must proceed with prudence, strictly observing the rules established by the Church. Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to his Church. Illness, especially psychological illness, is a very different matter; treating this is the concern of medical science. Therefore, before an exorcism is performed, it is important to ascertain that one is dealing with the presence of the Evil One, and not an illness. (Cf. CIC, can. 1172)

2173. The Gospel reports many incidents when Jesus was accused of violating the sabbath law. But Jesus never fails to respect the holiness of this day. (Cf. Mk 1:21; Jn

9:16) He gives this law its authentic and authoritative interpretation: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."(Mk 2:27) With compassion, Christ declares the sabbath for doing good rather than harm, for saving life rather than killing.(Cf. Mk 3:4) The sabbath is the day of the Lord of mercies and a day to honor God.(Cf. Mt 12:5; Jn 7:23) "The Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."(Mk 2:28)

Sharing and Discussion

1. Who is the most effective teacher you have known? What made this person effective?
2. Describe the difference between teaching with authority, and teaching without authority.
3. How can we allow Jesus' teachings to be more authoritative in our lives?

Closing Prayer

All: Prophetic God, you raised up leaders among your people to live out the compassionate, challenging word of Jesus Christ your Son. Receive our prayers that we too may answer your call to be agents of healing in the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

**Living The Gospel bible study/sharing via Zoom.
Every Wednesday
Time: 8 – 9.30 pm**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2760073734?pwd=cDRZR2JQMGRobVkwdTY3ZVF5L1BwZz09>

**Meeting ID: 276 007 3734
Passcode: 1WordOfGod**

All are welcome!

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References:

- (1) Gospel Notes are taken from The Navarre Bible
- (2) Gospel Reflection and Living Liturgy are taken from "Living Liturgy for Sundays and Solemnities" by Order of St Benedict. Published by Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota
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- (3) CCC references are taken from Catechism of The Catholic Church