

January 28, 2024
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 1:21-28

Then they came to Capernaum, and on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him.

All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

Background:

The Gospel text for this Sunday follows the call of the first disciples that was read last Sunday. Here Mark describes Jesus as he begins public ministry. Capernaum is a small village north of the Sea of Galilee. It becomes the base of Jesus' early ministry. The beginning and the end of the text describe Jesus as a teacher, but he is not like the other teachers of the day. He teaches with authority. The scribes are the scholars and lawyers of the day, and they are among the elite of society, but under the authority of the rabbis. They would teach by citing the teachings of other great teachers who had gone before them. One might think of a teacher who quotes many highly respected sources in the course of a lecture.

Jesus' teaching is described in the middle verses of this text. Rather than describe in some detail one of Jesus' teaching moments, Mark describes Jesus' encounter with an unclean spirit. People of the day believed in the presence of many spirits. Some were kind, others were menacing, but all were believed to be more powerful than humans were. The people believed that only God was more powerful. In Mark, the spirit knows who Jesus is and identifies him immutably as "the Holy One of God," a title for God that is used in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially by Isaiah.

The average person used a variety of objects and techniques in order to have some protection from the menacing power of an evil spirit. Contact with someone with an unclean spirit would render him or her impure. The presence of someone with an evil spirit in the synagogue would have been disruptive. In the Gospel, the spirit tries to get the upper hand by claiming to know Jesus' name, calling him Jesus of Nazareth and the Holy One of God. But Jesus is the more powerful, despite the fact that the spirit can call out his name. Jesus tells all the evil spirits to be quiet and come out of the man. They are obedient to him, the carpenter's son, who taught "with a new kind of authority," and his fame spreads.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are your beliefs about the spirit world? How do those beliefs find expression in how you pray and live your life?
2. Do you have any experiences of the presence of spirits in your life?
3. When you think of Jesus as a teacher, what are some of the moments of Jesus as a teacher that stand out for you? How have you tried to respond to Jesus' teaching in your own life?
4. When you think of Jesus revealing his authority, what are the moments you recall? What does it mean for you that Jesus taught with authority?
5. Who are the people who have taught you with authority? What is it, about them that gave them their authority?
6. Can you take some time to talk to God about your desire to have good teachers in your life, or thank God for those who have been teachers in your life, or maybe you have felt called to be a teacher and need to talk to God about that vocation?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for January 28, 2024, the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Moses spoke to all the people, saying: "A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen. This is what you requested of the Lord, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let us not again hear the voice of the Lord, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die.' And the Lord said to me, 'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it. But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die.'"

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.
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.
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."

Brothers and sisters: I should like you to be free of anxieties.
An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.
But a married man is anxious about things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided.
An unmarried woman is anxious about things of the Lord, that she may be holy in both body and spirit.
A married woman is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.
I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you,
but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction.

Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

Excerpts from Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; and Mark 1:21-28

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for January 28th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel tells of the first activities of Jesus in Mark's Gospel after the calling of his first disciples. Jesus goes with them into a synagogue on the Sabbath, amazing and astonishing the people at his teaching "not like the scribes, but with authority." Jesus also casts an unclean spirit out of a man after he cries out, "I know who you are—the Holy One of God."

The other readings also have references to hearing the voice of God, directly or through another, a future prophet, and attention to and adhering to the Lord. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, Moses says to the people, "The Lord, your God, will raise up for you a prophet from among your own kin, to whom you shall listen. This is what you requested of the Lord." Psalm 95 encourages, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts," and adds, "Let us come into his presence; we are the flock he guides." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Be free of anxieties. I am telling you this not to impose a restraint upon you, but for adherence to the Lord without distraction."

As we continue to follow the story of the early part of Jesus' ministry, this Gospel demonstrates to Jesus' newly called disciples, and to the people of the region, and to us, the power and the authority of this newcomer to their lives. For us, we get the benefit of supporting readings with prophecies and encouragements, from before his time and after. The Lord says to Moses, about the prophet, "I will put my words into his mouth." The psalm declares, "He is our God; we are the people he shepherds. Let us with thanksgiving acclaim the rock of our salvation."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!