

January 31, 2021
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 in Mark's gospel. Here Mark describes Jesus as he begins public ministry. The beginning and the end of the text describe Jesus as a teacher. He was not like the other teachers of the day, he taught with authority. The scribes taught 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. The people believed that only God was more powerful.

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 them 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. Because they obey Jesus, the carpenter's son who has come into their synagogue has taught "with a new kind of authority," and his fame spreads.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you believe in the existence of a spirit world? Do you believe in the existence of the Devil?
2. Whether or not you believe in a spirit world and the existence of evil spirits, do you carry out your day-to-day tasks without concern for or recognition of a spirit world?
3. Do you have any experiences that suggest to you that there is a spirit world, and that this spirit world has manifested itself in your life?
4. When you think of Jesus as a teacher, what are some of the great moments of Jesus the teacher?
5. 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?
6. Who are the people who have taught you with authority? What about them gave them their authority?
7. Can you take some time to talk to God about your desire to have teachers in your life today who can teach with authority?

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 annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-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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Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for January 31st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. Where this week's gospel starts is only 21 verses into the first chapter of Mark's gospel. Jesus had called disciples to follow him, and now he went into the synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath to teach. The people were astonished, because he taught with authority, different from the scribes. When a man with an unclean spirit cried out, Jesus said "Come out of him," and the spirit came out. The other readings also have references to hearing the voice and the authority of the Lord. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, the Lord said to Moses, "I will raise up a prophet from among their kin, and he shall tell them all that I command him." Psalm 95 declares, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." In the second reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, "I should like you to be free of anxieties, not to impose a restraint, but for adherence to the Lord without distraction.

Joe

Excerpts from the readings for January 31, 2021, 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