

The Fourth Sunday of the year; January 31st. 2021

May we always be attentive to the voice of God. Mk 1: 21-28

Too often, we define a prophet as one who sees into the future – a forecaster, or a psychic. But the biblical meaning of this role is someone who interprets the divine will. The prophet delivers God's message to his/her contemporaries and advocates for adherence to God's plan.

In the first reading, we encounter Moses, God's prophet who did marvelous deeds in fulfillment of God's will – leading the Israelites out of Egypt, giving them God's commandments, and leading them to the brink of the Promised Land. Moses relays God's message of another, far greater prophet: *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.* Further, God would hold accountable those who will not listen to his words.

In today's Gospel, we read of one such instance. When Jesus was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, *the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.* And that authority was further manifested when he drove out the unclean spirit from a man. The people were even more astounded that even the unclean spirits had obeyed him. The Church, too, continues to act publicly and authoritatively in the name of Christ. She exists to proclaim the Gospel message. In the name of Jesus, she calls down God's protection against evil in the rites of initiation.

What is the lesson for us in all of this? Perhaps the clue can be found in today's psalm response: ***If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Psalm 95:7-8).*** We are constantly being bombarded with messages, with voices: from tele-marketers and politicians; from friends and foes; from those who spew hate and from those who seek peace; from voices who want us to satisfy our own interests and from those who seek the common good.

Let us listen to God's prophets. Let us focus on those who have God's words in their mouths. This will take prayer and discernment, but it is possible with God's grace. In the midst of all the noise, may we always be attentive to the voice of God.

Yes, Jesus has authority, but his authority is that of someone who is among us. We need to have a relationship with him. Not an authority without Relationship! This story can explain a little what I mean by an authority without a relationship! A young second lieutenant at Fort Bragg discovered that he had no change when he was about to buy a soft drink from a vending machine. He flagged down a passing private and asked him, **"Do you have change for a dollar?"** The private said cheerfully, **"I think so, let me take a look."** The lieutenant drew himself up stiffly and said, "Soldier, that is no way to address an officer. We'll start all over again. Do you have change for a dollar?" The private came to attention, saluted smartly, and said, **"No, sir!"**

And finally, this NEW kind of authority which surprised Jesus' audience; In Mark's gospel Jesus himself is the content of the teaching. The authority is not in particular speeches, but in this particular life. Jesus lived as one who had authority, an authority radically different from that of tradition. Different from what had been expected. To understand this authority we must not only listen, we must also look around us wherever we are. Amen.