

Homily of Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2024

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

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy is a compilation of teachings, directives, and instructions from Moses, and God's laws in the previous books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers) that were to guide the people of Israel as they journey to the Promised Land and when they arrive at and settle in the Promised Land. The Book of Deuteronomy is referred to as "second law" or "second copy of the law" (Greek: *deuteros* – second + *nomos* – law). Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, so to speak, contain the 'first law.'

In Deuteronomy chapter 18, verses 9 and 14, Moses instructs the people, "When you come into the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abominations of the nations there." "Although these nations whom you are about to dispossess listen to their soothsayers and diviners, the Lord, your God, will not permit you to do so."

In the first reading, Deuteronomy 18:19, Moses spoke to the people what God said to him: "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 I command him.'" This statement was a prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus arrived, and during his transfiguration, God declared, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him" (Luke 9:35).

Today's gospel is a fulfilment of the first reading. Jesus taught with authority to his people and expelled unclean spirits. He is doing the same today. There is power and authority in his name and his word. "There is power in the name of Jesus, to break every chain, to break every chain, to break e-v-e-r-y chaa—iaan" (Song by originally written by Will Reagan).

The unclean spirits know Jesus and recognize power. The unclean spirits who encountered Jesus in the gospel cried out, "... Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God." As Christians, do we know Jesus? Do we recognize his power? Many Christians need to humbly admit that the unclean spirits have good something to teach them today!

Deuteronomy 18:19 warns, "Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it." We are reminded today "not to learn to imitate the abominations of the nations" which have been accepted and practiced, promoted and amplified by godless and Christ-less "soothsayers and diviners" in the form of social and news media, institutions, groups, cultures, politics, economies, psychologies, philosophies, religions, beliefs, theories, ideologies, and so on.

Further, the first reading warns, "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" (Deuteronomy 18:20). We know about many false prophets who speak

presumptuously and false prophets who speak in the name of "other gods." We know false prophets who commit all kinds of atrocities and deceive vulnerable and gullible people. God's judgement is upon them. Jesus says, "False messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will perform signs and wonders so great as to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told it to you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'He is in the desert,' do not go out there; if they say, 'He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it" (Matthew 24:24-26). Those who are deaf to Jesus' words will continue to be deceived.

The second reading (1 Corinthians 7:32-35) is a continuation of last Sunday's second reading (1 Corinthians 7:29-31). What we have, who we are, our relationships, and things of this world must not distract us from "adherence to the Lord." St. Paul encourages us to be free from anxieties (1 Corinthians 7:32). Are we encumbered with anxieties, and do we have a distracted and divided relationship with God?

In the gospel, "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'" (Mark 1:27). As Jesus' followers, we are supposed to have a share of his authority. Jesus promises us, "Behold, I have given you the power 'to tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:19). What has happened to the authority given to me through God's words and the Sacraments I have received? Do I still have it, or have I lost it? Who now commands the other? Do I command the unclean spirits, or do the unclean spirits command me?

As we begin a new year, let us surrender our anxieties, distractions, possessions, and uncleanness to Jesus to deliver us. Let us revive or reclaim the authority of believers given to us. Let us reestablish an undivided relationship with God.

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