

Homily – 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mark 1.21-28

A question we may ask ourselves today is, who is Jesus, and especially, who is Jesus for me? Who do I think Jesus is? We remember that Jesus asked that question of his disciples just before he turned to go to Jerusalem and the fulfillment of his mission. It is the crucial question, and much depends on our answer. In the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is giving his last speech to the people before they enter the promised land, and he tells them that their story and the story of God's role in their life is not coming to an end. Rather, he promises that some time in their future another prophet will come to them. *'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own kin; you shall heed such a prophet.'* Over the course of the years, God sent them many leaders, different kinds of leaders, judges, kings, prophets and priests, but none of them fulfilled God's promise completely. God's promise that, *'I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them everything that I command him'* had not been fulfilled. In fact, one of the questions the religious leaders put to John the Baptist was, are you the prophet? He told them he was not, so they continued to wait, to wait for the one who would speak God's word to them directly.



This is the state of affairs as we enter Mark's gospel. We need to remember that we are still at the very beginning of this gospel, and so far, Jesus has spoken two brief sentences. The first was, *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.* The second sentence was spoken to the fishermen, *come follow me and I will make you fishers of men*, and such was the commanding presence of Jesus that they immediately left their work and followed Jesus. The next report Mark gives of them is in Capernaum attending the Sabbath synagogue service. These meetings consisted of psalms, scripture readings and then a breaking open of the scriptures. Today, it is Jesus who speaks of the scripture reading and what it meant to the Hebrews. Mark does not tell us what the readings were, but undoubtedly, they were as they always were. Yet, there is a marked difference, and

the difference was in the person who spoke of the scriptures. He did not speak as others spoke. Not like the priests, or the learned scribes, or the Pharisees, not like any of them. They never spoke on their own authority, always on the authority of the scriptures themselves, or some rabbi's interpretation of them, or some feature of the law. Jesus did none of these. He simply spoke of the scriptures, God's message for humankind, and although he had no formal training or education as a scribe or rabbi, yet he spoke as someone from whom the scriptures flowed. The result was remarkable, or as Mark relates, his listeners *were astounded, for he taught them as one having authority*. It is Jesus himself who is the message; the one who walked up to the fishermen and said, *follow me*, and they *followed* immediately.

But it was not just the Jews who heard Jesus teach. For, *just then there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit*. If those present were puzzled by Jesus, the evil spirit wasn't. While humans were having difficulty determining Jesus' true identity, the evil spirit saw clearly. *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*. The spirit knew exactly who Jesus was and why he had come. He, the Son of God, became man so that he might conquer evil and invite mankind into a more intimate relationship with God. But those present do not grasp the full significance of what happened. *They were all amazed and kept asking one another, what is this?*



So we return to our question: who is Jesus for me? The evil spirit knew who Jesus was for him/her, but the people just kept asking questions. Do I ask questions about Jesus, do I wonder who he is, or do I know Jesus as a friend and a support? Do I know him as the person

who can give me the strength and courage to live my life as he taught? Have I turned to him in these days of the pandemic, turned to him as the one who can speak to my anxieties, my worries, and my fears? St. Paul tells the Corinthians that he wants them *to be free of anxieties*. Paul speaks God's message; God does not want us to be anxious but to put our trust in the one who teaches *with authority*. Our invitation today, and every day, is to trust that God wants the best for us, and in the midst of all our trials, especially in the midst of our trials, Jesus is there ready and willing to help us, not necessarily to remove the difficulty but to see us through it. We simply have to turn to him and to trust that he will supply our every need. Jesus, I trust in you, Jesus, I trust in you.

Fr. Charles Broderick