

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus taught "as one with authority." His words as well as his actions amazed those around him; in fact, in today's gospel story, it is his words that do the healing. There is a line in today's Gospel that intrigues me. It is the one, which says: "the people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant." Could such a thing be still said of us, who pride ourselves on being disciples of Jesus? Can we still be astonished and excited about because of what we find in Jesus and cannot find anywhere else? Or has what Jesus brings in our lives become so diluted and so commonplace that it won't set anyone on fire anymore? What has happened to the message of Jesus, that for so many of us it is experienced as a set of do's and don'ts- in other words, an enslaving burden-rather than something uplifting which enables us to go through life with a sense of freedom, a sense of dignity and a sense of purpose.

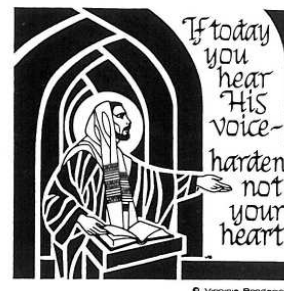
Today's Gospel passage speaks about a man who is possessed by an unclean spirit. It is important that we do not rack our brains over the man possessed by an unclean spirit, or by something demonic. That is just an image that the Gospel loves to use to describe the human condition outside the sphere of Jesus, an image to make us see how un-free we are when we try to make it on our own. It seems to me that the man possessed by an unclean spirit, as mentioned in today's Gospel passage, is in fact an image of ourselves wherever we lack freedom, wherever our true humanness is stifled and impeded, wherever we are not fully human yet. But the Gospel goes even further than that. It shows us Jesus entering the scene, with the authority given him by a people-loving God, and putting all these demonic powers in their place. He muzzles them, so that we become free and more authentically human.

What today's Gospel suggests is that when Jesus appears on the scene, and we let him in, all these different demonic forces can be driven out; they are not invincible. That is the vision and hope, which today's Gospel story wants to evoke when it presents Jesus as the exorcist. There is nothing sensational or weird about it. Far from it! It has everything to do with making people free so that they can live as a gracious and people-loving God intends us to live. What today's Gospel suggests is that the demonic in ourselves and in our society, whatever different forms it may take, can be driven out. What it takes from us is that we allow Jesus to shape our lives; after all, that is what believing in Jesus means. That sort of faith in Jesus does not enslave us or stifle our growth. On the contrary, it will finally set us free and enable us to live indeed as men and women upon whom God's favor rests.

With authority Jesus radically brought about change in people when needed. So, too, we need each other. We need the community of the church to help us make the right choices on our life's journeys. We must speak for one another with the same courageous authority with which Jesus speaks. We need each other's help. And as we help each other we also need to remember that the first duty of love is to listen.

Joy and peace,
Fr. William

4TH ORDINARY SUNDAY



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