

# Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B



## **Opening prayer**

Deuteronomy 18:15-29

(Ps 95:1-2,6-9)

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

**Mark 1:21-28**

## **Overview of the Gospel:**

- This Sunday's Gospel finds Jesus in the fishing village of Capernaum, located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is here that Jesus will make his home and establish the base of his ministry (Matthew 4:13; Mark 2:1; 9:33). Now that Jesus has begun to choose his disciples (see last week's Gospel reading), he is now poised to begin that ministry.
- On the day of the Jewish Sabbath, as was his custom (verses 21; 6:2; Luke 4:16, 6:6, 13:10), he went to teach in the synagogue where the Jews gathered to hear the Law and be taught. His disciples would continue this practice in the early years of the Church (Acts 13:14-16).
- His listeners were used to their Scribes (experts in the Jewish law) preface their teachings with phrases such as "It is written..." Jesus, on the other hand, often began his instruction with "Truly, truly I say to you..." or "Amen, amen I say to you..." (Matthew 7:28-29; John 1:51, 3:3, 5:24), speaking on the authority of his own word, as only God can do. Thus, Jesus' words had an absolute claim on his hearers.
- While at the synagogue, Jesus ministers to a man with a demon—an "unclean spirit", so called because this spirit was resistant to the holiness of God. This spirit, far from expressing faith in Jesus, knows and fears his power to destroy his influence, as Jesus goes on to do repeatedly with other demons in his public ministry (Mark 1:32, 34; 3:11; 5:2; 6:7, 13; 9:14).
- While contemporary exorcists relied on lengthy incantations and the burning of odorous plants to affect their cures, Jesus' simple word was enough (verse 25), again showing his authority.

## **Questions:**

- In the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading, Moses predicts to the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land that there will someday arise after him a prophet like himself. What are the characteristics of this prophet, and how do they find their fulfillment in Jesus?
- Where did Jesus begin his public ministry? What two things about Jesus amazed the people?
- How do you imagine this scene unfolded? Was the demoniac part of the congregation, or did he burst in from the outside? What do you think was the reaction of the rest of the congregation: Compassion? Embarrassment? Anger? What would your reaction be?
- What does it mean to teach "as one having authority" (verse 22)? What was the source of Jesus' authority (see John 5:19-24)?
- Did Jesus heal every person in Israel at that time, or even in every city he visited during his earthly ministry? Why do you think that Jesus healed the people that he did?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much authority does Jesus have over your life?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 2173, 438, 1673, 550, 394**

## **Closing prayer**

*When Christ came, he banished the devil from our hearts, in order to build in them a temple for himself. Let us therefore do what we can with his help, so that our evil deeds will not deface the temple. -St. Caesarius of Arles*

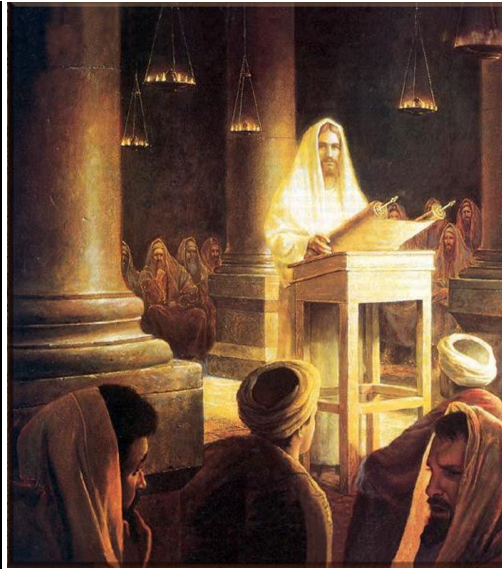
**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!**

# "Jesus taught them as one who had authority"

**Scripture:** *Mark 1:21-28*

*And they went into Caper'na-um; and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and 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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.*

**Meditation:** Do you believe that God's word has power to set you free and to transform your life? When Jesus taught he spoke with authority. He spoke the word of God as no one had spoken it before. When the Rabbis taught they supported their statements with quotes from other authorities. The prophets spoke with delegated authority – "Thus says the Lord." When Jesus spoke he needed no authorities to back his statements. He was authority incarnate—the Word of God made flesh. When he spoke,



God spoke. When he commanded even the demons obeyed.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) remarked that: "Faith is mighty, but without love it profits nothing. The devils confessed Christ, but lacking charity it availed nothing. They said, 'What have we to do with you (Mark 1:24)?' They confessed a sort of faith, but without love. Hence they were devils."

Faith is powerful, but without love it profits nothing (1 Corinthians 13). Scripture tells us that true faith works through love (Galatians 5:6) and abounds in hope (Romans 15:13). Our faith is made perfect in love because love orients us to the supreme good which is God himself as well as the good of our neighbor who is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26,27). Hope anchors our faith in the promises of God and purifies our desires for the things which will last for eternity. That is why the word of Christ has

power to set us free from all that would keep us bound in sin, deception, and despair. Bede the venerable abbot of an English monastery (672-735) contrasted the power and authority of Jesus' word with the word of the devil: "The devil, because he had deceived Eve with his tongue, is punished by the tongue, that he might not speak" [*Homilies on the Gospels* 1.8].

Faith is both a free gift of God and the free assent of our will to the whole truth that God has revealed. To live, grow, and persevere in the faith to the end, we must nourish it with the word of God. The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds that we may grow in his truth and in the knowledge of his great love for each of us. If we approach God's word submissively, with an eagerness to do everything the Lord desires, we are in a much better position to learn what God wants to teach us through his word. Are you eager to be taught by the Lord and to conform your life according to his word?

*"Lord Jesus, your word is power and life. May I never doubt your saving love and mercy, and the power of your word to bring healing and deliverance to those in need."*

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