

## **The Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

***January 28, 2024***

At the heart of our Christian faith is our belief that we have a God who communicates with us. We call this communication the Word of God. Our Sunday worship consists of two parts of the Mass: The Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is in the Liturgy of the Word that God communicates to us. We believe that what we hear are not just human words, but divine words from God. We end each reading by proclaiming, "The Word of the Lord." At the end of the Gospel, we proclaim, "The Gospel of the Lord." We believe it is Jesus himself who speaks to us in the Gospel.

Prophets are those who proclaim the Word of God. Moses is never listed among the prophets. But in our first reading today he refers to himself as a prophet. Of course Jesus is God's most important spokesperson since he himself is the Son of God. This is why the Gospel reading is preceded by a special acclamation. Out of respect for the words of Jesus we stand for the Gospel. In today's Bible readings we will have a deeper insight into the living word of God that we hear proclaimed.

## ***Homiletic Scripture Reflection***

Our first reading is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses himself speaks to the people. He refers to himself as a prophet and predicts that God will raise up another prophet. Moses predicts that a prophet will rise up and tell the people God's message. As Christians we believe that great prophet is Jesus himself. Jesus is called the Word. He is indeed the living word of God. Our Responsorial Psalm is taken from Psalm 95. "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Our second reading is a continuation of First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. In this reading he talks about celibacy. He believes that this is a way to be free of the anxieties of marriage. It is a way to adhere to the Lord without distraction. Paul does not impose celibacy but offers it as a possibility. Throughout Church history we have had both celibate and married clergy. In our Roman Rite priests must be celibate, but we have both married and celibate deacons. Other Catholic rites have both celibate and married priests. Those who join religious orders of men or women embrace celibacy as part of their commitment.

In our Gospel today Jesus enters the synagogue in Capernaum. The people are astonished at his teaching because he speaks with obvious authority and not merely quoting things as the scribes did in the synagogue. There was a man with an unclean spirit who recognized Jesus and 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!” Jesus expelled the unclean spirit, and the people were amazed both because of his style of teaching and his power over unclean spirits. And Jesus fame spread everywhere throughout Galilee.

### ***Reflection Questions and Homework***

Do you truly believe when you read from the Bible, that God is speaking his words to you? Besides reading the words themselves, we have to apply that specific message to us. That is why we need to pray over the scripture. First, we have to hear what the Lord is saying, and then apply it to ourselves in our particular situation. For example, when I was in the seminary, I had a very difficult time discerning whether or not I could live a celibate lifestyle. The message of Paul in our second reading was most difficult for me. Well, I wanted to be a priest and saw some advantages to celibacy. But I did not know whether or not I could live this lifestyle. It was only after several years of prayerful reflecting on what God was calling me to do, that I discerned he was inviting me to be a celibate priest. The message I received is that he would give me the grace that I needed. While celibacy for me was never easy, I am very happy that I accepted the Lord's invitation. I have been very happy with over 50 years of priesthood.

As you read today's scripture do you believe God is really speaking to you? Just what is his message? Today we should be thankful that the Lord speaks to us through his holy word.

If you have children at home talk to them about the Bible being the word of God. Explain that in church the deacon or lector carries the word of God in an elevated position because it is sacred. Explain that we stand for the Gospel because it is the living words of Jesus. Explain that the homily is an attempt to help us understand what God is trying to tell us in the Bible reading. Let them create a little throne in which to put the Bible in your home. Explain that the Bible is sacred because it is God's word. Lead them in a little prayer thanking God for speaking to us in the Bible.

Peace and love always,

Father Mike Ahlstrom