

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

28th January 2024 - 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Deuteronomy 18:15-20. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. **Gospel:** Mark 1:21-28.

A day at Capernaum and we get the first inkling of the great power struggle which took place when God encountered the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

Mark understands the incidents of the day as part of his much greater story. The people at Capernaum in the synagogue that Sabbath day were deeply impressed and astonished. They started asking what it all meant.

Mark sees this reaction of the people as very important in the steps towards discipleship. Astonishment and wonder open the mind to the possibility of a greater world, still unseen, but at least faintly glimpsed.

The journey to faith often begins in an honest search for meaning or in that openness of mind that sees the wonders of everyday life.

I am always amazed at the sheer wonder of creation, and we, through modern media are able to see so much more than previous generations. Hidden cameras in nests and whatever habitats animals make and use, and their very intense care for all their young is amazing. As is nature's delicate balance. The wonder of the Creator.

Alongside is the ugliness of pollution, the poisoning of the waters and the piercing of the umbrella of the atmosphere. That in turn breeds a companion ugliness in forms of art and music which manifests all the diabolical signs of cacophony and convulsion.

When Jesus taught in the synagogue they were amazed. His authority was derived not from the power of holding a religious office, he was not ordained priest, nor scholarly scribe, nor from mere expertise. The authority that Jesus possessed, then and now, is from his being one with the author, the Creator, of the very truth he propounded. His words and his acts were one and the same.

As his teaching could fill the mind and heart with the wonder of God's love, so his acts could restore broken people to wholeness, to God's peace.

As God creates the world by His Word alone, so Jesus uses his words alone to subdue the forces of evil that have taken possession of the man in the congregation.

Recently, the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism had acknowledged Jesus' identity. Here another supernatural being does the same. Jesus' authority is drawn not from this world but from the divine.

Although there were many teachers of the law and interpreters of scripture at the time, and many exorcists and healers, none was invested with this direct authority.

And yet when Jesus restores health and wholeness, hostility and conflict are ever present. Here the unclean spirit immediately recognises Jesus and, in the act of leaving its human host, causes the man to suffer convulsions.

The competing authorities of good and evil are ranged against each other from the start. Hostility between them is a constant theme in Mark's gospel, although we know who ultimately triumphs.

The people in the stories are challenged to take sides: the disciples: the authorities, the people in the crowds, the listeners. **So are we.**

When we hear the uncompromising position Jesus takes against evil, we are asked where we stand on that. Do we tolerate it for an easy life? Do we give in and behave in ways more in keeping with Satan than with Christ? Do we face our own demons and, with God's grace expel them from our lives?

To speak, act and live with Christ's authority is a vocation that calls us constantly to grow closer to him, day after day.

We have the means to do that through prayer; through daily attention to scripture reading, study and meditation; through the sacraments and the constant practices of the virtues.

St Charles de Foucauld said: ***Read and re-read ceaselessly the Holy Gospels, so as to always have before one's mind the actions, words and thoughts of JESUS, in order to think, speak and act like JESUS***

On this Racial Justice Day we look for tolerance, respect and an openness to neighbours and strangers, and others who are different.

Challenging authority in this world is something that we all may be called to do from time to time.

But we are also called to recognise the ultimate authority of God, and to reflect on how that challenges us in our daily living as his disciples.

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