



FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

January 31, 2021
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Today we look at recognising JESUS' uniqueness – seen in His powerful teaching and His authority over evil.

In the final verse of our psalm today we learn that the first step in gaining real wisdom is to recognise that the LORD is to be feared.

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practise it have a good understanding. His praise endures for ever. Psalm 111 offers us many reasons to worship GOD –

1. ^The psalmist considers how great the works of the LORD are (v2-4)
2. ^He then reminds us of GOD's provision and covenant love for His people (v5)
3. ^He then rejoices GOD's provision of a land even at the expense of others, (v6)

4. ^that GOD can be relied upon in all that He says and does. (v7 & 8)
5. ^Finally, he speaks of how GOD redeems His people. (v9)

These are all good reasons to cry out with wonder to the GOD of gods and LORD of lords! Although many psalms recognise the darker side of life, nothing clouds the horizon of this one.

Our Gospel passage from Mark, however, presents a more troubling picture. Demonic power is present and powerful even in the synagogue as the people of GOD meet for worship (v21-24). The language, as well as the action, is violent – the man “**cries out**” at the fear of destruction; JESUS rebukes and commands silence; and the man convulses and cries out again – this time with a “shriek” (vv24-26). No wonder the people are amazed. However, the story makes clear that it is not just the violent and inappropriate happenings that amaze the crowd, but JESUS Himself. Here is a man who speaks and acts with unparalleled authority and power. If they

were amazed before the incident, they were even more so afterwards. Not the usual Sabbath worship! They had never seen anything so dramatic before – they regard His actions as a new teaching. They are not yet at the point reached by the first disciples who asked, “WHO IS THIS?”, after JESUS stills the storm – a question answered only gradually in the course of Mark’s gospel.



In our society, we all have the privilege of a formal education. It is then best if we remain informal students for the rest of our lives – because there is never a point at which there is not something we can learn. At the same time, most of us function as teachers in our lives – some of us professionally, but most of us casually – guiding and directing people in ways that might even escape us. We teach by how we live, how we treat people, how we respond under stress. How we reprimand a child, how we help a neighbour – as well as do more concrete and direct ways of teaching.

Some of us, by training and vocation, teach religion and theology and even SRE. We must always strive to remain students in this area of our knowledge – because in the things of GOD, we are always students. It is humbling – especially for biblical scholars – that JESUS did not choose His apostles from among the biblical interpreters of His day. He chose fishermen. How could they be teachers of the Bible and Jewish law when they had not been formally trained? ^Elsewhere in the Bible – for example in Acts 4:13 it says: ¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. What did they know that the experts did not?

What the fishermen knew – or were willing to encounter – was the only true subject – GOD. The unschooled fishermen knew JESUS, spent time with JESUS, and were willing to learn from JESUS what they didn't know. It was not technical expertise that JESUS sought in His

apostles – but – the willingness to encounter the Word of GOD as life-changing and life-giving.

It was the encounter with truth that led the crowds of ordinary people in Galilee, Judea and elsewhere, to gather around the teacher, JESUS. They responded as people hungry to learn the deepest reality about GOD and themselves. So, “on the Sabbath JESUS entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes.” The religious experts – the scribes – are mentioned – though it seems they are not present, as a contrast to JESUS’ authority. Perhaps the experts hung back, wary of how JESUS’ teaching might affect their livelihood or authority – OR – because they disagreed that JESUS’ authority was grounded in the Scriptures or GOD.

Yet, JESUS’ final act in the Capernaum Synagogue if the demonstration of the divine ground of His teaching authority – for, “in their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit. 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!”” JESUS healed the man of the unclean spirit and the people were again amazed – referring to this action of JESUS as a “teaching”: “They asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching – with authority.” It is GOD’s presence and power that is the lesson not only to learn but to encounter.

It is necessary to have teachers in all areas of knowledge – and this includes theology and biblical studies. Expertise and properly ordered authority are essential for all fields. But ultimately, we are all students of the one teacher – whose authority is ordered to our salvation and joy. From this school we never graduate because this teacher is always guiding us. The education is perfected for our final purpose of knowing GOD.

Fr. Gil Alinsangan, a Filipino catholic priest reflects on this gospel in these terms:

The subject of the unclean spirit can only be speculated upon. He warns us that the unclean spirit is probably

masquerading as something good – even virtuous – even holding deeper motives. The man may have been a respected member of the synagogue – someone like you or me.

For a long time, this man could comfortably go to the synagogue and go home without feeling in any way disturbed about his life or actions. **^But when JESUS entered the synagogue and spoke with authority – the authority of GOD – the evil spirit in the man became deeply disturbed and threatened. Powerless against the Holy One of GOD, with a loud cry he came out of the man. It must have been a shocking but liberating experience for that poor man.**

One of the greatest (and subtlest) plays of the devil is to help us feel comfortable in our ways, to assure us that we are very good, and everything is OK – even when this is not the case. May the LORD visit us – as He visited the synagogue in Capernaum – and disturb anything within us that is not of GOD. May He drive out any forces

of evil that may be finding a home within us – whether as individuals or as a Church community.



May we pray:

Holy One of GOD, in casting evil out of our world you inaugurated the kingdom of Your Father. Teach us how to speak boldly in the face of whatever evil confronts us. We draw our strength from You, our LORD JESUS CHRIST who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reign as one GOD for ever and ever. Amen

All-Age Lectionary Services – Scripture Union – 2011 – Milton Keynes, England

GOD’s WORD Daily Reflections 2021 St Paul’s Publications 31/01/21

Celebrating the Lectionary – Year B – Garratt Publishing, Mulgrave, VIC 2020

LIVING LITURGY 2021 Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 2020

Daily Prayer 2021, Liturgy Training Publications. Archdiocese of Chicago IL 60609