

JANUARY 28, 2018

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 DT 18:15-20

Responsorial Psalm PS 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9

R. (8) **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Reading 2 1 COR 7:32-35

Gospel MK 1:21-28

Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. 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 rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

HOMILY:

Next Sunday around 6:30 pm ET, there is little doubt what most folks will be doing in Boston and Philadelphia, and what some 110 million Americans, one in three, will be doing. Most everything else will be put aside for many, to watch the annual national worship of the pigskin, the Super Bowl. I'm actually going into the center of the storm—to visit some old friends for a couple of days in Philadelphia. With an arrival time of six minutes after the game starts, surprise, the fares are low at that time! No one wants to be flying into Philadelphia at that time—they want to be in front of the TV—and little will stop them from watching Super Bowl 52!

There is a story told about another Super Bowl, #6, played in early 1972 in New Orleans. There, the Dallas Cowboys won the first of their five Super Bowls, defeating the Miami Dolphins 24-3, with MVP being the Cowboys' quarterback Roger Staubach. Despite being "most valuable player," Staubach felt obliged later to give credit to his coach Tom Landry, who called all the plays of the game. Staubach admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn't call his own signals was a source of trial for him. Coach Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run and only in emergency situations could he change the play (and he had better be right!). Even though Roger considered coach Landry to have a "genius mind" when it came to football strategy, pride said that he should be able to run his own team. Roger later said, after winning another Super Bowl six years later, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory."

While personal success might be seen as one's own achievement, Staubach discovered something else. He discovered that obedience was the source of success. For, as we plot out the course of our lives, we'll need to listen to some voice to direct us. It may be our own voice, or it might be the voice of another who is more capable and who knows more. But like Staubach, too often our pride tempts us to refuse to listen, to obey another. For, obedience isn't always seen as

a good thing, but Staubach discovered it was the way to “harmony, fulfillment, and victory.” And, in honesty, can we not accept that as long as we listen only to our own voice, we are often not the expert of each situation and can find ourselves mired in frustration? While we remain the ultimate authority of our lives, we find that life is not one of harmony, fulfillment, or victory—for we’re just not expert enough to guide all of our lives. But . . . we are cautious and even suspicious about allowing another to have authority over our choices and life’s direction, because: What if their authority is not for our good?

We gather in this church with some intention to give authority of our lives over to Jesus, whom we hear, in today’s gospel, speaks and teaches “with authority” that even the demons obey. What does it mean to teach “with authority”? The word authority derives from the same word that is the origin of our word “author,” the Latin word *auctor*, meaning “master, leader, and author.” Therefore, one who teaches with authority demands our obedience as a master, leader, and author (or creator) of our life’s direction. Are we willing to accept the authority of Jesus? Well, as it turns out, there are only three options: **First:** I will be the authority of my life. I can only speak for myself that this has rarely worked out well—how about you? **Second:** I will cede this authority to some other person, with some kind of slavish need for the approval of another person, where I need their direction—my friends, my co-workers, my parents, my children, etc. This has gone a bit better than when I call the shots for my life, but only a little better, because others can direct me poorly as well. Living for the approval of others too rarely works out. **Third:** I will allow God to direct my life through the divine “mouthpiece” of Jesus. Do you want Him as the Master, Leader, and Author of your life? To do this, we must know Him, love Him and serve Him in our life by following closely His commands to serve others, forgive others, and humble myself before the needs of others. And, because of Who He is, we can have confidence that He is a good, trustworthy authority, whom His listeners in the gospel found amazing and Who commanded the deadly life-destroying spirits to depart, they did, and life was restored.

In the end, we’re going to listen to some voice to direct our lives. Will it be a life-giving voice, or will it be a deadly one? Since Jesus first came to our earth, folks have definitely found Him to be what he promised he would be: “the way, the truth, and the life” [*cf.* John 14:6]. We’ve tried listening to our own demanding voice, or the demanding voices of others. Maybe we ought to listen to the authoritative voice of Jesus, who is Love, who will guide us to joy and peace if we can but put our trust in His voice. But to listen, we’ll need to humble our own voice and listen to Him. Lord, give us the strength, love, and faith we need to listen to your commands, for you speak with an authority that is trustworthy, loving, seeks only our good, and shows us the path to life. For this is who you are: love and goodness itself. And when we give you authority over our lives, the result is harmony, fulfillment, and victory. Maybe it’s time for these.