

Homily Notes for 28 January 2018, 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Readings: Deut 18:15-20; I Cor 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28

1. Introduction: The call of Jesus to do battle with evil. Moses prophesied the coming of Jesus. Jesus came to call disciples to do battle with evil. Are we willing to follow His call?

2. Today's first reading is particularly important because of the promise of a prophet like Moses who would tell them God's will. Moses was about to die. The Chosen People were terrified because they were about to lose him. Moses assured them:

“A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin, and will put my words in his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him...”

After the return from the Babylonian exile (c. 538 B. C.), the Jewish priests began to interpret this text of Deuteronomy as referring to one individual, namely the Messiah who was to come. The New Testament followed this interpretation and saw these words of the dying Moses "*a prophet like me*" verified in Christ (Acts 3: 22; 7: 37). These verses therefore, have been chosen for today's first reading because they refer to Jesus, the "preacher with authority," mentioned in today's Gospel.

3. In the second reading, St. Paul taught that marriage is a holy state ordained by God and that it is a life-long partnership according to the teaching of the Lord (see Mt. 5:32; 19:3-9). Further, Paul recommended a life of virginity to the non-married, suggesting that they not marry, only if they felt they could live such a life. The advantage of celibacy, as Paul explained, was that celibates would have the freedom to serve God fully with the fewest earthly cares and worries, but married people are called to follow God fully, but within the further cares of marriage. This passage is part of the scriptural basis for the celibacy of the clergy in the Latin Church (See also Mt 19:12, 1 Thess 4:3-8).

4. In today's Gospel we see the authority of Jesus: This passage begins and ends with comments about Jesus' authority as a teacher (1:21-22 and 1:27-28). In between is an exorcism (1:23-26), pointing out a connection between Jesus' teachings and his supernatural authority. Moreover, this is the first episode in Jesus' ministry which Mark recounts after the call of the disciples. Mark in his gospel repeatedly returns to the theme that Jesus' teaching with authority gave him followers, and Jesus' healing with divine power liberated people from illness and demonic possession. The Catholic Church derives her teaching authority from her founder Jesus, who is God. Even today Jesus performs miracles and casts out demons! I would like to remind us that it is still true that evil forces are still working against us and the Church, especially in the area of our marriages and families. He wants to separate us from God. Jesus has called us to help him in this fight. This is why people after they are confirmed are more than "children of God." Once confirmed we are to be "soldiers of Christ."

5. Exorcising with divine authority: In the synagogue, there was a man who was troubled by an unclean spirit. Everyone in the ancient Biblical world feared evil spirits and believed in demonic possession. Jesus came to destroy the unclean spirits living inside of us, to wash them away, to cleanse our lives of them. Jesus commanded the evil spirit harshly, using strong words and tones: "*Be quiet! Come out of him!*" This was one of the reasons why Jesus developed a reputation for speaking with authority. There is currently an awareness, growing again, of the presence of demonic powers and spirits. How else can we explain the sudden explosions of anger that occur, the suicidal impulses, the intense jealousies, wild sexual fantasies, or overwhelming feelings of depression? We, as human beings, are keenly aware of these unclean spirits. We can see daily in the news the way some people will publicly protest and even risk their lives for things that God says "No" to. We often wonder where the "unclean thoughts" come from and why we can't rid ourselves of them. Could this be part of the demonic power of pornography? It puts out something pleasurable as bait and hooks us on an addiction. Let us put ourselves under his authority, being his active disciples, and he will liberate us.

6. But Jesus has authority over all of this. We need to decide to listen to Jesus. He has sent his Mother many times to warn us. It well could be that the Family Rosary could transform us. Our Lady, in one of the statements from Fatima, warns us that marriage and family is one of the most important areas of conflict with Satan.

7. Battle with the Evil One over marriage, which may well be the last big battle, as he seeks to seduce us.

Ex. Bad teaching and tolerance of sinful behavior in the schools, the proliferation of pornography through the internet, our tolerance of and the growth of the drug culture, acceptance of divorce and conflict within families

Ex. Poverty as a result of single mothers and broken homes. Importance of the family in overcoming poverty. We raised the issue of why children may be hungry. The single most important factor in avoiding hunger is having a father and mother together in the home. Only 10% of children in poverty and hunger had both parents together in the home. Also, the fastest route into poverty is to be a single woman with children. We really need more godly, responsible men and women.

8. Importance of the family. Sr. Lucia, the last of the visionaries of Fatima spoke about this to St. John Paul the Great saying, “The final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan will be about marriage and the family. Don’t be afraid, because anyone who operates for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be contended and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue. However, Our Lady has already crushed its head.”

9. Application and recognition of God’s authority in our marriage: Are we willing and eager to follow God’s guidelines for marriage? Are we willing to follow God’s guidelines for our use of our bodies? Can we expect faithful and stable marriages without faith and sexual self-discipline, both before and after marriage?

10 We must decide on whose side we are going to fight. Once in a Catholic school classroom, when this war with evil was being discussed, one student raised his hand and said: “I am on neither side. I am in the neutral zone. I don’t like war.” The teacher responded, “Bad news. There is no neutral zone. When an enemy attacks you, there is no neutral zone. You are in war and if you do not resist you will be destroyed. So you have only one choice. Which side will you fight on, Jesus or Satan?”

11. That is our situation. Let us choose to be with Jesus, now. The Devil is a spiritual being. We can’t see him. We must use the spiritual weapons God has given us. Let us think strategically as we begin this year of formation.

1. **The community of the Church** is so important. The Church is where we are taught. It provides support. It is the key place for the study and hearing of the Word, frequent participation in Reconciliation and the Eucharist and all the Sacraments and prayer.
2. **Family prayers and devotions** like the Rosary. This will require controlling our use of TV, electronics, Facebook, etc. in order to prioritize formation in and use of spiritual resources.
3. **Putting our children in places where they get right teaching and have good companions.** This includes serious, adult supervision of all our children’s activities.
4. **Involvement** in Mass, attendance at CCD by both adults and children, attendance at Catholic School, and other godly contacts.
5. **Being sure that we have received all the Sacraments.** A friend of mine noticed that when she was baptized as an adult, a persistent presence of evil bothering her went away.
6. **Working on our marriages** and helping others to learn how to love in a Godly manner. Especially using the “Testimony to Love” materials that we have from the Diocese.

12. These are all major weapons in our fight to bring about the defeat of Satan and the powers of evil. Remember, Satan doesn’t care what you care about or worship as long as it is not Jesus. Remember that Jesus wants us to be with him in this battle. Let us take up the spiritual weapons God has given us and really do battle with evil. That is why Jesus called to himself disciples. Are we willing to take up the cause in our time?

Good Resources: **Guadalupe Radio, 910 AM (Dallas) and ewtnradio.org**
Testimony to Love, diocesan marriage formation and enrichment program.