

**4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Jan. 28th 2024; Cycle – B
Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Last Sunday we heard how Jesus called the four men, Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him. It is interesting to notice that before he called them, Jesus had not revealed to them his identity at all. These young men followed Jesus assuming that he was a young Rabbi. Perhaps they felt honored for being chosen by a Rabbi as they were outcaste in the society. This week we see Jesus enter Capernaum, the city of Galilee. It was a custom at that time that whenever a new Rabbi emerged in the area, the synagogue official in a particular locality would invite him to share the word of wisdom on Sabbath celebration. Being a young Rabbi Jesus too was given such an opportunity.

As Marks writes, people were amazed by Jesus' teaching for the very reason that he taught with **authority**. But the appearance of a demoniac on the scene changes the whole situation. First of all, the demoniac considers Jesus to be a threat and questions him and claims that he knows him as the **"Holy one of God."** People never considered a Rabbi of that time as the Holy one of God. For the title **Holy one of God** is attributed to the Messiah. As people were confused, Jesus cast out the demon with word of authority. By this time the amazement and marvel of people reached the highest point. They started with all sorts of questions. They wonder, **"What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands the unclean spirits and they obey him."** It is strange that during the entire public ministry Jesus never manifested clearly his identity as the Messiah. Very often his identity was revealed by the people with unclean spirits.

In this short passage one thing draws our attention. **Mark says, "He taught them as one having authority, not as the scribes."** Of course, in the popular language, a man of authority means the one who has position or power over people. But in the case of Jesus, people didn't understand the word authority in the popular sense. Here Marks means that there was no dichotomy in Jesus between what he preached and what he practiced. He had the full moral integrity. The scribes, though they taught people they didn't live what they taught. They were not a good role model for the people. In a way there was hypocrisy in them. That is why Jesus warned the people against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. He says, **"Therefore, do whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice"** (Mt. 23:3). Mark says, *"The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes."* In other words, people could see moral integrity and authenticity in Jesus. A person with authority can be a good model to all. Only an honest person can speak with authority. In the past the world witnessed great political, social and

religious leaders who lived what they preached and led the people along the right track. There were a lot of religious leaders who are great saints and their model is still a big inspiration for us. There were great parents and school teachers who were great moral strength for the younger generation.

These days we have a lot of leaders around us in every area of life. Unfortunately we are running short of leaders who can speak with authority. When the religious leaders fail to practice what they preach, naturally they lose the moral courage to speak against the evils of the time. When the political leaders lack the integrity, the nation is misled. Unfortunately, many parents are unable to teach their children with authority as their model is not very helpful for the formation and growth of the children. Many teachers consider their profession as just like another career. So they don't think that their moral life or good example has anything to do with the formation of their students.

A few years ago a Catholic School in New York dismissed the Kindergarten teacher from the school. The reason was that she became pregnant out of wedlock. Many didn't find anything wrong with that as such incidents are common these days and that was her personal issue. Even the major TV channels came out with severe criticism against the school authority and the local Bishop. But the school management made it very clear that the teacher who is not a good model to the young children and giving wrong message, has no moral right to teach them. They never changed their decision at all. Many defended the teacher with the argument that her personal life had nothing to do with her profession.

We all have different roles to play and the younger generation looks at us for model. So when, we the leaders, teachers and parents become capable of speaking with authority we will be able to build up a morally and politically healthy future society. Our one bad example may cause an innocent one to be misled. Jesus is very stern on the sin of scandal. Listen to the words of Jesus, **“Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come.” (Mt 18:7).** So I as pastor, you be the parents and teachers should be very careful in what we say and do.