

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JANUARY 30 AND 31ST, 2021

A NEW TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY: MAKE A DECISION FOR CHRIST

After narrating the arrest of the precursor of our Lord, last Sunday's gospel opened with these words of our Lord, "This is the time of the fulfilment, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1: 14-15).

How is the kingdom at hand? It is because the Lord Jesus has come. He is the kingdom! Today's gospel illustrates this. Our Lord entered the synagogue in Capernaum and taught. His teachings came with an authority that astonished the people gathered for worship. To their greater amazement, our Lord exorcised a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue with a simple word of command. They exclaimed to one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him" (Mark 1:27).

The exclamation of the people - a new teaching with authority is the theme for our sermon this morning. The first thing to observe in this miraculous event is where it happened - Capernaum, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This is significant because it is a place that had known great destruction, degradation and sorrow. It was the first part of Israel which Assyrians invaded and destroyed. When the Assyrians occupied it and lived with

the few native remnants side by side, Capernaum became a district of the gentiles and a place of distress and anguish for the natives. Isaiah prophesied that one day the anguish would take wings and darkness would be dispelled from the land (Isaiah 8:23). Then the people of that land would see a great light and their burden, the pole on their shoulders and the rod of the taskmasters would be smashed (See Isaiah 9:1,3). How and when would this happen? The prophet answered, "For a child is born to us a son is given us, upon his shoulders dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-forever, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:5). The coming of our Lord to Capernaum fulfilled this prophecy.

As we see from today's gospel passage, Jesus did this in two unique ways. He spoke the Word of God with authority, and he exorcised the man possessed by an evil spirit. Our Lord's teaching brought the people out of darkness into God's marvelous light. By setting the man oppressed by the devil free, he smashed the enemy's yoke. "The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen" (Mark 4:16). Witnessing these marvels, the Lord had done, elicited the question, "What is this?" The answer - God had come in person - Jesus the Christ. The promise of God delivered through Moses had been fulfilled. "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). In Christ Jesus, we see this prophet. He taught with authority because He is the very Word of God. The plea of the people of God, that a

prophet like unto Moses has been given to them had been answered beyond their wildest imagination. Unbeknownst to them, their prayer was a veiled appeal for incarnation - God to become man and speak in human languages. "In times past, God had spoken in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets. In these last days, he spoke to us through a Son, whom he had made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (Hebrew 1:1-12).

What is the point of all this? It is that in our midst is Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, the Messiah and Savior. This calls you to make a decision. Are you going to give him your whole-heart or a divided heart? Are you anxious about how to please Jesus or about the things that do not last? Remember his words, "This is the time of the fulfilment, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel"(Mark 1: 14-15). Are you striving towards perfection by keeping God's commandment? Or are you living your life in a permanent state of sin? Are you in a relationship that is not the will of God for you? For instance, are you living together with your girlfriend without being married or are you married outside the Church? Do you prefer and promote abortion rather than defend the most vulnerable of all? Are you in a homosexual relationship? How can darkness and gloom take flight from your life? What might be the cause of the burden weighing on your heart? Is there darkness that clouds your vision of the Truth? Please bring them to Jesus.

May you allow the Lord to do for you what he did for that man who was oppressed by the unclean spirit. May you give him permission to do for you what he did for the people who dwelt in great darkness and shadow of death? May his great light shine in your life. Do not forget his word, "Come to me all you labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves" (Matthew 11:29).