

SEPTUAGESIMA 2021

Deut 18:15-20

1Cor 7:32-35

Mk 1:21-28

In the past year the issue of authority has become a recognisable issue for many people. We have been bombarded by the opinions of self-declared experts and powerful organisations using their strength to assert their authority by manipulating public opinion. Respect for authority within the general population has taken a hit, be that legal and rational authority, the authority of spiritual tradition and culture or the authority of a charismatic individual.

Moses instructed his people to respect the authority of God visible through the highest, not the lowest, standards of human life. They were to avoid superstition, fortune tellers and self-proclaimed prophets and mystics. We could add the media giants to this list. For Moses, a true prophet is one who is obedient to God and whose prophecy comes true. Both ancient Israel and the Christian Church are called to discern, test and then be obedient to God's voice. For the Christian this is revealed in and through Jesus and the teaching of the apostles and their successors.

St Mark's gospel presents Jesus' primary activity as that of teaching, but like the Suffering Servant in the book of Isaiah, Jesus' teaching is often demonstrated in what he does rather than what he says. In today's gospel reading the driving out of the evil spirit is teaching, not simply healing. When the witnesses see what Jesus has done they respond by saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even unclean spirits and they obey him!" (Mk 1:29)

This exorcism is the only occasion in the gospels in which an unclean spirit is cast out in a synagogue. St Mark's gospel intertwines two themes, the theme of Jesus and Judaism and Jesus and evil. In the synagogue the evil spirit speaks first, shouting that there is nothing in common between evil and Jesus. One is set on destruction, the other on salvation. The evil spirit knows what Jesus has come to do and he knows he is the Holy One of God. In this gospel evil is the first to recognise Jesus' true identity. The bitter struggle continues and the possessed man convulses and through a loud cry evil is overcome just as it is finally overcome when the crucified Jesus issued a loud cry and breathed his last (Mk 15:37).

Like St Paul, St Mark sees the law of Moses as an authoritative power that must be reset because it prevents God's people from being free. The law divides Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, males and females. Jesus has come to break down barriers, so Satan and Judaism line up against him. He destroys them by being destroyed by them. The evil spirit asks Jesus, "Have you come to destroy us?" We who know the whole story of Jesus' resurrection and ascension into glory know that this is only half the truth, so the spirit is muzzled.

Evil is still actively causing chaos in people and the world. Except in the mind of a few, it is not lined up with the rigidity of Judaism, but it *is* lined up with the divisiveness of secularism which has permeated the Church, emasculated her ministry and sabotaged the aims of the Holy Spirit. The smoke of Satan has convinced some clergy that what they read in the

scriptures, say in the liturgy and state in the creeds sounds very fine but is not what they believe. They have provided their lay faithful with watered down milk, not solid food. This is why too many Catholic laity don't know what the Catholic Church actually teaches other than doing good and being nice. Line this up with abuse scandals in the Church and a desire to be like everyone else and the mix is ripe for people to abandon the Church and give up the faith altogether. We in the Ordinariate are not exempt from this evil onslaught. We must do what Jesus did and that is to stand firm and give ourselves and our challenge **up to** God and that is very different from just '**giving up.**'

Onward to Lent.

Msgr H Entwistle
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