

SUNDAY 04-B ORDINARY TIME

“Sharing in the Power and Authority of Jesus”

(Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 95; 1 Corinthians 7:17, 32-35; Mark 1:21-28)

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Are you familiar with the expression to “Walk the talk?”

Live your faith and share in the power and authority of Jesus.

The great American lecturer, essayist and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, could have coined that phrase, to walk the talk. He once wrote, “Only so much do I know as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has lived. One person speaks from within, or from experience, as a possessor of the fact; another speaks from without, as a spectator, or as acquainted with the facts on the evidence of a third person. It is no use to preach to me from without. I can do that myself.”

He could have been speaking about Jesus when describing the person who speaks from within. Jesus possessed a unique and extraordinary authority. That is evident in the gospel account for today, and throughout the scriptures.

At the time of Jesus, no scribe ever expressed his own opinion without first quoting his authorities. Jesus spoke from his own person, from within. The Greek word for authority is *exousia*. It derives from *ex* meaning “out of” and *ousia*, meaning “being.” Jesus, like no other, spoke from within, from his own being.

Some human beings have an unaccountable spiritual authority. This gives them enormous moral authority. They have this authority, not by virtue of an office they hold, but by virtue of the kind of persons they are. This is the greatest and highest authority of all. It has its roots in the authority of God himself. Without it the holder of an office is a mere functionary, a mere mouthpiece. Jesus possesses this kind of authority to a degree unequalled by anyone else. Every Christian, irrespective of whether or not he/she holds an office, can and should have some of this kind of authority – the kind that comes from being a person of transparent integrity.

Nelson Mandela is an example of that kind of authority and integrity. He was imprisoned unjustly in South Africa for twenty five years because of his struggle against apartheid. Yet upon his release, he more than any other person spoke of the need for forgiveness and power sharing with the very white people who imprisoned him. When he speaks of forgiveness and reconciliation, people listen to what he has to say because he has lived it firsthand. He has that kind of moral authority that commands attention.

Speaking without that kind of authority is to run the risk of being phony and even destructive. I remember one speaker at a Marriage Encounter once who after he had written his talk that mentioned daily dialogue with his wife, got a mining job that took

him away from home, one week in and one week out. The problem surfaced at the next ME that he was part of because he had not revised his talk and ended up blatantly reading what was no longer true – a daily dialogue with his wife. The men in the crowd were especially disgruntled and the team had to work hard to do damage control just to keep some of them from leaving the weekend.

In the first reading today Moses, the great prophet himself, spoke of a great prophet who would come, to whom we must listen. That prophet is Jesus, whose authority comes from his relationship with the Father as Son of God.

According to the New Interpreter's Bible, even the demons in Mark's retelling prove to be more perceptive than the human audience. They acknowledge that Jesus' coming marks the end of their own domination over human beings. The end of demonic power is a sign that the present evil age is coming to an end. The crowd sees Jesus as a powerful miracle worker, but they do not recognize that he is the Son of God, as do the demons. Satan's power is being broken up because the Lord has come to redeem the people. Therefore, the exorcism indicates what it means for the kingdom of God to draw near.

The kingdom cannot be separated from the person of Jesus, who embodies God's power. In her book, *Preaching Mark*, Bonnie Thurston notes that the use of the Greek word *phimotheti*, which our translation renders as "be silent" actually means "be muzzled." It's what one would do to a dangerous dog to stop both his bark and his bite. That's what the word of God does to the unclean spirits. Jesus speaks with that kind of authority.

The New Interpreter's Bible adds that the unclean spirit is the antithesis of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus possesses. When attempting to resist the exorcist, the demon speaks for the entire kingdom of evil spirits by using the plural, "Have you come to destroy us?" The swift, violent reaction of the demons proves the truth that Jesus is the Holy One of God. The demons provide insight into Jesus' identity for readers of the Gospel but not the characters in the crowd. The amazement over Jesus' powers does not mean that the people believe in him. The danger that may be posed by having a reputation as an exorcist is met by Jesus' command for the demon to be silent. The evangelist is not interested in exorcism for its own sake. The focus of the story remains the divine authority exercised by Jesus, yet invites a response from the crowds that is more than amazement at a miracle.

What should our response be? Certainly we need to pray for strong faith in who Jesus is that far surpasses merely amazement. We also need to be attentive to the demons in our own lives. We need to be on healing journeys ourselves if we are to be credible witnesses to others and speak out of our own experience of healing. Lastly, we can do all we can to minister to others through teaching God's word that contains within it an openness to the healing power of that Word.

Fr. Allan is a priest who at one time struggled with clinical depression and burnout. He took many months off to go on a 12 Step healing journey that included much therapy. Soon after arriving at his new parish, he noticed a very tense and serious woman given to

sudden outbursts of anger when things did not go her way. From the experience of his own healing journey, he suspected abuse in her past and invited her to go on a healing journey. Sensing his sincerity, she hesitated but finally accepted. He invited her first of all to write out her story – to go back to when she was in her mother’s womb and before her first memory, to discover what was happening to her mother and in her family during that time. Then she wrote all she could remember from her first memory to the present day and shared that all with him.

He then invited her to receive God’s forgiveness through sacramental confession for how she had reacted negatively to all that hurt by hurting others instead of forgiving them. The next step was to share her feelings of hurt with those who had abused her with love, without blaming, name calling or seeking revenge, in letters that she either delivered or read aloud to the person if the recipient had died.

This healing journey was painful but transformative. She was freed from the spiritual burden that she had carried for years; so much anger and resentment, sadness and self pity, shock and shame, guilt and fear. Her family and friends who knew her were amazed at the change in her, at her emergence into the person they had known as a child, a person who could laugh again, tease, play and have fun. She had experienced the power of Jesus to heal her, through the authoritative ministry of a priest who had walked the talk.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is an act of faith. The unconditional love of the Holy One of God who shed his blood and died for us on the cross is made present for us through Word and Sacrament. That love reaches deep within the darkness of our lives to exorcise the evil that still clings to us, to heal us and make us authoritative witnesses of that love.

So let us continue to joyfully praise this God who lives and speaks a liberating truth that sets us free. Let us live our faith and share in the power and authority of Jesus. Let us resolve to always walk the talk.