

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ord. "B"
Jan 31-Feb.1, 2009

In the book of Genesis we hear of the fall of the first man and woman. It is Satan's lies that deceive them. Whether we want to believe it or not, Satan is real and his deceptions are real. He is hard at work, up to the same old tricks he used on our first parents. Satan appears to Eve as a Serpent who, in his oily manner, convinces her that God's authority is oppressive. He asks Eve, "Did God really tell you not to eat of the fruit of this garden? Even responds, "No, it is only the one tree that we are not to eat from, lest we die." Satan tells her "You will surely not die, God know that if you eat it, you will be like Gods". Then you will not have to obey God at all. You will be free.

Eve is then tricked into believing that Satan is only concerned for her and Adams freedom and happiness and that God is an oppressive authoritarian trying to limit their fun. She eats the fruit and so does the man and slavery and death are the consequence. By rejecting Gods loving Authority they gained a harsh and cruel master.

The word Authority comes from the same Latin word as Author. The basic meaning of this word is creator. It implies that we can trust the words and instructions of the one who has knowledge of a things purpose.

Jesus goes to the synagogue in Capernaum with four of his disciples where people are astonished that He teaches with such authority. A man in the synagogue, possessed by an evil spirit, recognizes Jesus as the "Holy One of God" (The Author of life) who has come to destroy the spirits of evil. After Jesus casts out the evil spirit, the people in the synagogue are amazed at the power and authority that Jesus possesses.

After the cure of this possessed person, Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law and many others afflicted by illness or by evil spirits.

Jesus begins his public life with these acts of compassionate power. Just before these incidents, the Gospel of Mark has told us of the baptism of Jesus, where the Spirit descended upon him and the voice of God said to Him, "You are my beloved Son." Jesus is then tempted by Satan not to trust those words. After the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus goes to Galilee where he proclaims that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He calls disciples to follow him, and together they go to the synagogue at Capernaum where today's Gospel passage occurs.

The cure of this man possessed by a demon represents the beginning of the New Covenant when the power of Satan's kingdom will at last be destroyed. That is why the demons cry out to Jesus "Have you come to destroy us?"

Jesus entered a world where Satan's power reigned supreme. In to that world He brought the light of truth, the words of the Author of life. That's why Jesus' teaching was recognized to have such powerful authority. Jesus shows that this Authority is truth, because he casts out the evil spirits that hold people in bondage and fear.

This is how Jesus mission began. It will not be completed until the end, "when he hands over the Kingdom to His God and Father, when He has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power . . . The last enemy to be destroyed is death". The work of Jesus mission continues even today.

Jesus called His disciples to be with Him as He began His mission at Capernaum. They were to carry on the work of that mission with His powerful grace as their weapons. Now He calls us to be with Him as He continues His mission in the towns

and cities where we live. The Spirit has been given to each of us at baptism, and a voice from heaven has said to each of us, "You are my beloved." And like Jesus, and like Adam and Eve, we are tempted by Satan not to believe these words. We are tempted to believe that the power of evil seems to be invincible. We will be tempted to use power and authority, not with Christ's compassion in service of others, but to gain advantage over others and to establish our own Kingdoms.

The Disciples themselves struggle with the temptation to listen to and believe Satan's lies. The Gospel goes on to tell us that two of the disciples who were with Jesus at Capernaum (James and John) make the assumption that discipleship means enjoying positions of power. Jesus summoned all His disciples together and explained what Authority and power really are. He said that among the Gentiles, rulers make their authority felt and lord it over people. But, among His disciples, whoever wishes to be great must be the servant of all.

This compassionate servanthood was the source of the power and authority that allowed Jesus to Teach with such profound effect, and allowed Him to cast out demons, to cure illnesses, and finally to give himself up to death on a cross. It was a power and Authority that came from the supreme source of Love, God Himself.

If we call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ and if we take our faith in Him seriously we will be servants to one another and to the world around us. This means that we will root all our actions in generosity, gentleness, compassion and a desire for truth. As Parents, as ministers in the Church and at our work, we cannot turn away from the voice of God. We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by Satan who still whispers in our ear,

“The teaching of God is foolish, it wants to control you, it is oppressive, it wants to take away all your fun.

These are the very words you hear from today’s Atheists. They quote almost word for word the same things that Satan said to Adam and Eve and the same phrases that he spoke to Jesus in the desert, and the same things that were told the disciples as they preached to the people of the Roman Empire.

They are spoken to us today as well. We hear them when we react to Jesus’ teachings that call us to be generous, compassionate to the poor and the immigrant. We hear Satan’s voice when we are controlled by lust or when we are made to feel foolish for believing and trusting the Church’s teaching about abortion, premarital sex, the sanctity of marriage and contraception.

God is the Author of life and His teachings lead us to peace, joy and eternal life united in the arms of His love.