

## Homily: Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021

I remember some time ago giving a talk. I tried to prepare it carefully and deliver it in the most interesting way I could, and it seemed to go quite well. A few days later, a lady rang me one evening and said to me: "Father, I was at your talk the other night and I really enjoyed it." Naturally I was very pleased. And then she added: "Can you just remind me what it was about?" So I realised that, whilst I had made some impression on her, whatever I had said obviously hadn't sunk in!

At first glance, we might think something similar as we listen to today's Gospel. St Mark tells us that Jesus' teaching "made a deep impression" on the people at Capernaum, and twice notes that He taught them "with authority". And so the obvious thing we would like to know is: "What did He say?" Yet, perhaps a little frustratingly, Mark does not record the content of the Lord's preaching. He simply explains the effect that it had, and notes the authority behind it.

That authority is partly seen in the miracle our Lord works today, the first miracle recorded in Mark's Gospel. A man possessed by an unclean spirit, a demon, interrupts Jesus' preaching and challenges Him. In response, the Lord casts the spirit out of the man, restoring him to his senses. In this moment we see a sign of the saving work of Jesus: He has come to cast out evil from our world. Gradually the kingdom of evil is being dismantled, and will meet its final defeat in the Lord's death on the cross, when evil, sin and death will be definitively conquered. This scene gives us a warning: evil is real in the world, and it is not an impersonal force. The devil is real, and he actively works to thwart our efforts to grow close to God. But alongside this warning, there is great consolation: the power of Jesus is much greater. We place all our trust in Him.

Today's Gospel shows us that, in Jesus, the kingdom of darkness is being defeated; it is being driven out by the kingdom of light, the Kingdom of God, which He brings. The miracle Jesus works and the message He preaches are the same: the Kingdom of God is at hand. Last week, we heard Jesus teach precisely this: "The time has come," He said, "and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News." Although St Mark doesn't spell out for us today what Jesus preached in the synagogue, we can be sure that this was His message. This is the new teaching which made such an impression on the people.

The teaching made an impression because He taught them with authority. We see this authority in His ability to cast out a demon: Jesus rebukes the evil spirit and says "Be quiet! Come out of him!" Later in the Gospel, Mark records that Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea and tells them to "be quiet" – the miracle in which He calms the storm. The Lord has power over nature just as much as He has power over unclean spirits. In fact, He has power over all. It is by His word that the universe was created: God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. He only need speak, and it is done: "Your sins are forgiven", and they are forgiven; "This is my Body", and bread becomes His Body. One word of Jesus is all it needs. "Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

So we see the authority of Jesus: He speaks and it happens. But there is another reason why His preaching comes with authority. This word, *authority*, is closely related to the word *author*. Jesus teaches with authority, because He is the author of the message. He is the author of life, of love, of salvation, and He preaches what He Himself both lives and offers. He Himself is the Kingdom of God present in the midst of His people. Where He is found, the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, is found: God's will is perfectly fulfilled in Him. Where Jesus is present the kingdom of light prevails, and the kingdom of darkness can have no place.

Now, here is something really important. Today, at this Mass, Jesus comes to teach us. Just as He did in the synagogue at Capernaum on that sabbath day, today, and every Sunday – every sabbath day – Jesus comes to teach us. He comes with authority: the same authority He had all those years ago in Capernaum. Do we allow the Lord's teaching to make a deep impression on us? Do we listen to the Gospel and take it to heart, receiving it as a word spoken with the authority of God Himself? Or do we allow ourselves to hear only what is comfortable and easy for us? Jesus is not just the author of life in general; He is the author of my life and your life: therefore He has authority over us. His message is always Good News, even when it is challenging. He wants it to make a deep impression on us, not just to scratch the surface, because He knows that, at the depths of our being we need Him: we need His grace, His healing, His Kingdom to live in us.

Fr Andrew

