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Commentary on the Gospel: In the Synagogue at Capernaum

Gospel for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 1:21b-28)

And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was

in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”

And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

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Commentary

According to Christian tradition, Mark was the disciple who wrote down the recollections of Peter about Jesus' life. In today's gospel passage we begin the narration of an entire day in our Lord's life. That day may have been engraved on Peter's memory with special clarity because it took place near where his own home was located.

According to archeological findings from that area, the synagogue of Capernaum was located quite near the place where very early Christian worship was held in Peter's former home. It is easy to imagine how moved Peter would have been to have the Master stay in his own home, where he could find rest and nourishment.

Like all pious Jews, on the Sabbath in the morning our Lord arrived with his disciples at the crowded synagogue. He soon began teaching

those present, who listened with amazement to the Nazarene's words. It was not what they were accustomed to hearing from the Pharisees. This man spoke with great authority, in a new and surprising way.

Jesus' listeners would likely have paid close attention to his external bearing, to his gestures and way of reacting spontaneously to daily events. And they saw how his own life and actions bore witness to his teachings.

Saint Josemaria was struck by Jesus' way of teaching with his deeds, which gave authority to his words. "*Coepit facere et docere*. Jesus began to do and then to teach. You and I have to bear witness with our example, because we cannot live a double life. We cannot preach what we do not practise. In other words,

we have to teach what we are at least struggling to put into practice.”

Saint Gregory the Great remarked: “the way to teach something with authority is to practice it before teaching it, since teaching loses all its force when our conscience contradicts our words.” Friar Example is always the best preacher.

Besides his consistent life, Jesus backed up his preaching with a power that left his contemporaries amazed: his ability to cast out unclean spirits. These demons addressed him with impudence and with at least a partial knowledge of his identity and mission. But they were also afraid of him and obeyed Jesus’ commands.

Later the Apostles would be sent out to preach and cast out demons in Jesus’ name. We Christians are also called upon to assist the Master in the work of evangelization, undoing

the action of the enemies of our soul. We will do so by announcing the Gospel with the testimony of our own life.

Pope Francis insisted: “The Gospel is the word of life: it does not oppress people, on the contrary, it frees those who are slaves to the many evil spirits of this world: the spirit of vanity, attachment to money, pride, sensuality... The Gospel changes the heart, changes life, transforms evil inclinations into good intentions. The Gospel is capable of changing people! Therefore it is the task of Christians to spread the redeeming power throughout the world, becoming missionaries and heralds of the Word of God.”

Pablo Erdozain

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