

Fourth Sunday in O. T. B/2018

The readings of this Sunday talk about the mission of the servant of God. They show the spirit with which it has to be exercised and its outcome. They invite us to listen to the messenger of God and to entrust our lives to his healing power.

The first reading of the book of Deuteronomy describes the speech Moses gave to the people of Israel at the time he was about to choose a successor to him in order to continue the mission received from God. It recalls the circumstances preceding the choice of the successor and reminds the people that such option corresponds to their wish before God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's plan of salvation is eternal and it is his will that the mission he gives may be carried out continually for the salvation of humankind. Another idea is that a prophet is like an ambassador who speaks on behalf of God and not in his own name. The last idea is relative to the accountability of both the prophet and his listeners who have to respond adequately to God's message.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel. First of all, the Gospel starts with the teaching of Jesus in a Synagogue in Capernaum. Then, it talks about the astonishment of the people at the authority with which Jesus was teaching. After, it talks about the healing that Jesus performed while he was there. The Gospel finishes with the amazement of the people following the healing and the spread of Jesus' fame.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the effective power of the word of God. In fact, today's Gospel starts with the astonishment of the people in the synagogue at the teaching of Jesus who, unlike the scribes, was speaking with authority. That authority of Jesus comes from the power with which the Father has invested him as his only begotten son.

The fact of being invested with God's power makes of Jesus a legitimate messenger of God more than all those who preceded him. At that title also, what he does is exactly what his Father wants for the salvation of the world. Moreover, what he says is right because it conforms to the will of his Father. Because of the unity existing between him and his Father, the words Jesus pronounces are those of his Father and the works he performs are done by the Father who is present in him.

Therefore, Jesus has the right to give orders, to make decisions and to make things happen on behalf of his Father with whom he is in intimate relationship. That is the reason why when he speaks, he does not hesitate to deliver a message that is right in its content and effective in its scope because it is intended to obtain that for which it was sent by the Father, namely to heal, to bring peace to the brokenhearted and to restore humans to their dignity of sons and daughters of God.

That is what happened in the synagogue as he was preaching. In fact, he was teaching with such an authority that none had had before. He was acting with such a power that none had had before to the point that everybody in the synagogue was just amazed.

The Gospel says also that in the Synagogue, there was a man who had an unclean spirit. An attentive observation of the situation shows that before Jesus entered the synagogue, the possessed man was calm and seemed to be normal like anybody else.

But, once Jesus entered and started talking, things became different for him. He felt that there was in the person of Jesus someone really powerful who was invested with the power of God. He felt that Jesus was almost his enemy that he had to confront. That is why he addressed him and questioned him if he had come in order to destroy them.

In fact, Jesus and the devil are like two enemies who meet at a social gathering. They certainly know that they hate each other. When they see that the circumstances of life have brought them together at one gathering, they try as much as they possibly can to ignore each other until the inevitable confrontation happens.

But, as it is very often the case, the powerful ends up by winning either in arguments or in fight. In the present case, Jesus, by casting out the demon, declared victory over him. Let me come back again to the observation I made, namely that before Jesus entered the synagogue, the possessed man looked like a normal person. But, when Jesus started talking, what was hidden in his life became clear that he was possessed by a demon.

Here, we have a clear indication that the word of God is capable of disclosing the secrets of the hearts of people. In fact, anytime people accept to listen seriously to the word of Jesus with an open heart, it is impossible not to be challenged. The challenge can be such that people feel compelled to do something, whether they change their life according to Jesus' demands or they run away with the intention of not listening to it anymore.

But, when they accept to let the word of Jesus guide them, it becomes like a lamp that sheds light on their acts and enlightens the situations in which they live. This Sunday God gives us an opportunity to assess the way we listen to his word and act on it. Let us ask him to give us the grace of listening to his word with an open heart and an open mind. May God help us accept the challenge he presents to us so that we become truly his disciples. May God bless you all!

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20; 1 Corinthians 7: 32-35; Mark 1: 21-28

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