

FOURTH SUNDAY IN OT B2021

When I was a student in Belgium, I used to regularly go to eat with a family friend in an old restaurant founded around 1800, which was outside the city of Brussels. What impressed me was the fact that this establishment had continued for years without interruption. Even though the personnel had changed and the building had undergone some modifications and changes, the spirit of the founder was kept alive.

That is how human institutions, as old as the states, function for years in fidelity to the spirit of the founding fathers. What is true for human institutions is also true for the Church. When God chose Moses to lead his people out of slavery, he made him a powerful prophet and an outstanding spokesman of his Covenant with Israel. As a human being, Moses knew he was not immortal and would die one day. But the work for which he was instituted as a leader would continue, for the glory of God and the good of his people.

It is in that sense of his mission to be continued after him that Moses speaks before the people in the first reading. He reminds them of the promise God made to him to raise another prophet like him in their midst and who would tell Israel what God commands.

Because what the prophet says comes from God, the people have to obey and accept it. Otherwise those who do not listen will be accountable before God. Moreover, given that such a mission comes from God alone, nobody has the right to attribute to himself such an honor. Therefore, any prophet who presumes to speak in the name of God what he did not command him, or tries to speak in the name of another god, will be liable to judgement.

This warning is for all of us who have a particular mission of teaching inside the Church, like priests, educators or catechists. We have to be careful not to preach about our own personal opinions rather than the word of Jesus as given to us in the Bible and through the teaching of the Church. We better bring to people the word of Jesus and not our own words.

When Moses was speaking to the people, there was certainly a short term and a long term of God's promise to him. The short term was about his direct successor. The long term was about what God wanted to do for the whole world. Meanwhile, as many prophets succeeded in Israel over the years, one after another, the people continued to hope that one day God would send a final prophet who would lead the people to the whole truth, and reconcile them with God and one another. It is in that context that the idea of Messiah grew in Israel until Jesus fulfilled that promise.

As we heard in the Gospel, when Jesus came in the Synagogue of Capernaum on the Sabbath, he was certainly invested with the power and the authority of Moses, according to the promise of God. He spoke with such an authority that he was not like those who came before him.

A question that comes up is this: Why did Jesus make such an impact on his listeners? Because, he spoke from within the heart, as we often say. There is no authority like that of the one who has experienced and lived what he is talking about. He does not try to please people, but rather to tell the truth that can set them free. In fact, in Jesus'

speech, there was such freshness and transparency about what he said that none of the rabbis who came before him could equal him.

It is important to distinguish authority and influence. Authority implies sincerity, integrity and truth. When those ingredients are missing, someone might be influential, but he cannot convince. Even if sometimes people might follow him, in the end they are right to wary about his motives and suspicious of his intentions.

Jesus was able to teach with conviction because he knew that his authority came from the Father who was present within him and was acting through him. He had nothing to fear because he had the truth and that was clear to all who heard him.

Another question pops up? Why did God the Father give Jesus such authority? The reason God invested Jesus with power and authority was that he heals the wounds of sins and restores to full health the sick. In fact, where God's word breaks through in human history, announcing the coming of his kingdom of justice, love and peace, everything changes for the best and the reign of evil is in trouble.

That explains why Jesus heals and casts out the demons. Jesus and the devil, indeed, are like two enemies who meet at the social gathering. As they hate each other, they try to ignore each other until, in the end, the 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.

The Gospel shows that when the possessed man was in the synagogue before Jesus came in, he was calm and looked normal like anyone else. Once Jesus entered and started speaking, he disclosed himself and confronted Jesus. This episode teaches us that any time the word of God is proclaimed in the assembly, it is like a powerful attack on the devil. This episode shows also that the word of God is capable of disclosing the secrets in the hearts of people.

If that is the case, it means that anytime we accept to listen to the word of Jesus with an open heart, it challenges us in our situations of life. But, when we accept to let that word guide us, it becomes like a lamp that sheds light on our acts and enlightens our life journey. Jesus invites us to sincerely and humbly welcome his word in our hearts. Jesus invites to the conversion of heart and the reconciliation with him anytime his word convicts us.

Let us ask the Lord to give us the grace of listening to his word with an open heart, to act on it and come to live our lives for the glory of his name. May God bless you!

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



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