

GOSPEL

MARK 1:21-28

Jesus and his followers went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the Sabbath came Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.

In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit, and it shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant. 'Here is a teaching that is new' they said 'and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday's Gospel reading is part of a wider narrative called the "day in Capernaum". At the heart of today's reading is the event of the exorcism through which Jesus is presented as a powerful prophet in word and deed.

He enters the Synagogue of Capernaum on a Saturday and he begins teaching. The people are astonished by his words because they are not ordinary words. They do not sound like the ones they are accustomed to hearing. The Scribes in fact teach but without any authority. And Jesus teaches with authority. Jesus instead teaches like one who has authority, thus revealing himself as God's Emissary, and not a simple man who has to base his teaching solely on earlier traditions. Jesus has full authority. His doctrine is new and the Gospel says that the people commented: "a new teaching! With authority".

At the same time, Jesus reveals himself to be powerful also in deeds.

In the Synagogue of Capernaum, there is a man who is possessed by an unclean spirit which manifests itself by shouting these words: "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". The devil tells the truth: Jesus came to destroy the devil, to ruin the demon, to defeat him. This unclean spirit knows the power of God and he also proclaims his holiness. Jesus rebukes him saying: "Be silent, and come out of him!". These few words from Jesus are enough to obtain victory over Satan, who comes out of that man "convulsing him and crying out in a loud voice", the Gospel says.

This makes a strong impression on those present. Everyone is overcome by fear and asks themselves: "What is this? [...] he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him". The power of Jesus confirms the authority of his teaching. He does not just speak with words, but he takes action. In this way, he manifests God's plan with words and with the power of his deeds. In the Gospel in fact, we see that in his earthly mission, Jesus reveals the love of God both through preaching and through countless gestures of attention and aid to the sick, the needy, children and sinners.

Jesus is our Teacher, powerful in word and deed. Jesus imparts to us all the light that illuminates the sometimes dark paths of our lives. He also transmits to us the necessary strength to overcome difficulties, trials and temptations. Let us consider what a great grace it is for us to have known this God who is so powerful and so good! A teacher and a friend who shows us the path and takes care of us especially when we are in need.

May the Virgin Mary, the woman of listening, help us to create silence around us and within us, in order to hear, through the din of the messages of the world, the most authoritative word that there is: that of her Son Jesus who proclaims the meaning of our existence and delivers us from all slavery, even that of the Evil one.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Have you ever experienced someone 'powerful in words and deeds' (in a positive sense). What was it that made their words and actions 'powerful' and 'moving' in the best sense of the word.
- Have you experienced Jesus' words and deeds having a powerful impact on your life or the life of those around you? Share that experience?
- In what ways have your words and deeds had an impact on those around you? How might such a realisation impact the way you speak and act?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.