



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

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4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 31, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Most organizations have their own structures and rules to be followed, and clearly marked levels of authority, in order to ensure that the organization functions properly. The military is an example of this type of organization, an organization that has various levels (ranks) of authority that must be obeyed without question by those of lesser rank. Disobedience to authority within the military can have very serious consequences. There is a story about a captain of a battleship that highlights this point. It was a very foggy night when a great battleship was returning to port. Even on clear days other ships will give a battleship complete right of way; on foggy nights all other ships were formally required to give way to a battleship. As the battleship neared port the captain noticed a light in the distance directly in front of them, a light that clearly seemed to be another ship. The captain ordered his radio operator to inform the ship ahead to steer 20 degrees left to avoid a collision. Immediately the battleship received a response suggesting that *they* steer 20 degrees left. The captain again ordered his radio operator to inform the other ship to steer clear. Again, the response came back suggesting the *battleship* steer clear. Now angry, the captain ordered his radio operator to radio that by formal order of the captain the other ship was to turn. The response came back: "This is the lighthouse. Captain or not, this lowly watchman orders the captain to immediately turn the battleship."

Rank does indeed have greater authority within the military, but as the story highlights, authority that believes itself to be solely correct and not accepting of challenge or correction, is a dangerous authority. The story does not tell us if the captain turned the battleship. If the captain *did* turn the ship, then that is an example of authority that is open to correction. If he did *not* turn the ship, lives would no doubt be lost, and the captain's authority forever destroyed. Authority in the military is based upon

trust, trust that the one with the authority will use it wisely and not place others' lives at risk. Use of authority is a challenge to those who accept its responsibility.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes)

What model of authority do you most often embrace when you find yourself in a position of authority? What model of authority do you *respond to* most, either positively or negatively, when exercised by others towards you?

The Table of the Word

THEME: Authority of Jesus

We can define authority as the ability or right of an individual, a scholar or expert perhaps, to give orders, make decisions, enforce obedience, and to influence the lives of others. Without question, authority can bring to bear upon others either negative or positive influence. Why? While power is necessary for authority, one can have power without authority. When examining the authority of Jesus as revealed in the scriptures, we see Jesus exercise three types of authority. One, legal authority – faithfulness to the word of God, most especially as revealed in the Torah. Two, traditional authority – based upon generations of customs, practices and ritual religious activities since the dawn of creation. Three, charismatic authority – the persona of the person draws people into a deeper relationship with the one exercising authority. Watch in today's gospel passage as Jesus exercises all three types of authority.

Leader: Let us seek forgiveness from the Lord who teaches with authority.

For the times we have not embraced Jesus' teaching,	Lord, have mercy.
For the times we have rejected Jesus' authority,	Christ, have mercy.
For the times we have ignored the prophets,	Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray (together)

*As one having authority, O God, your Holy One
comes to teach us and to set our spirits free.
Release our hearts from all that binds us,
that with single-hearted resolve and unhindered devotion,
the work of your kingdom may claim all our energy and zeal.
We pray this through Christ our Risen Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)

FIRST READING (Deuteronomy 18:15-20)

Moses spoke to the people; he said: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own kin; you shall heed such a Prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: 'Let me not hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, lest I die.'”

“Then the Lord replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their own kin; I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them everything that I command him.’”

“Anyone who does not heed the words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will hold him accountable. But any Prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak – that Prophet shall die.”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

Brothers and sisters, I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.

The unmarried woman and the virgin are concerned about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is concerned about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.

I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 1:21-28)

The disciples went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then 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 the man and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

At once Jesus' fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

Deuteronomy. In this passage Moses is clearly preparing the people for the time when they will settle in the new Promised Land. Moses reminds them that in the new land they will find others already settled there. According to Moses, the people must prepare themselves to “get along” with those already living there, even if they encounter pagans. Their task will be to get along with these pagans, while at the same time not picking up their pagan practices and customs – they are to remain faithful to God. But do not fear, Moses reminds them that God will continue to support them by sending prophets into their midst, even a great prophet from among their own kin.

1 Corinthians. While Paul uses the example of marriage to drive home his teaching today, let us not allow the issue of marriage or non-marriage to take our focus off of Paul's primary teaching. Paul's point seems relatively clear. Paul is exhorting the people to continue to grow in their faith, in their relationship with God, even in the midst of the distractions of life. In other words: do not allow the distractions of day-to-day life to negatively impact your life of faith. Even in the midst of distractions, we can turn to God in prayer for guidance and support.

Mark. Today's section of the Gospel of Mark essentially marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It is also important to note that Mark was written for those people who already knew Jesus – the Gospel would therefore make concrete, make understandable, the things people already knew and believed concerning Jesus and His teaching. Today's focus is to highlight the contrast between Jesus and the scribes. The life of the scribes was focused upon the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, which presented the word of God as binding upon the people of faith. The scribes recognized that the binding word of God in the Torah was presented with rather general principles. Although they seemed clear, the principles were not particularly applicable to everyday living. The scribes took as their primary task the interpretation and teaching of the Torah principles, so as to make them practical to everyday life. Jesus in His teaching does the same thing; however, there is a marked difference to the interpretation and teaching of Jesus. Jesus communicates in such a way that the people are “amazed”; Jesus is teaching with a new authority; Jesus is presenting a “new teaching,” one that is even victorious over unclean spirits. The people found this approach by Jesus exciting, an approach that made sense to them, one that could clearly and practically be part of everyday life. This would result in how “Jesus' fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.”

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 *“A Prophet like you from among their own kin”*

Moses promises the people that the Lord will not abandon them, that prophets will be sent to them bringing the word of the Lord. In this context, a prophet serves as a mediator between the people and the Lord, explaining and teaching the word of the Lord. Who are the prophets of today? What aspects of the word of the Lord do prophets perhaps need to explain and teach today? How do we identify a true prophet?

1 Corinthians 7:32-35 *“promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord”*

According to Paul, the dedicated living of one's faith will help to promote good order within the community and greater devotion to the Lord. Having said this, Paul is also keenly aware that the world brings with it many distractions that can negatively affect our lives of faith. Yet it would seem Paul is not suggesting we hide from the distractions of life, but rather address them from within the context of our faith. How do we bring our lives of faith into play when we encounter distractions?

Mark 1:21-28 *“They were amazed”*

The celebrity of Jesus grows in today's gospel passage. People are mesmerized by His teaching ... they find strength and comfort from His teaching ... they are transfixed by the person and message of Jesus. In today's language we would perhaps describe the people in the gospel as having been transformed—their lives would never again be the same because of their encounter with Jesus. Have you ever had an encounter with Jesus that transformed you? Share as much as you are able.

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *“He taught them as one having authority”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

When the people describe Jesus as one teaching with authority, they are at the same time saying that His authority is from God – He is the Son of God. Spend some time this week reflecting upon the authority of Jesus. How has it, or how does it, impact your life? Do you find comfort from the authority of Jesus? Are you open to receiving the authority of Jesus, or do you sometimes question His authority?

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Let us intercede for our own needs and needs of all in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

That the church may teach the truth of God with an authority born of faithful witness and loving service, we pray to the Lord ...

That the Lord our God may raise up prophets in every land and put in their mouths the challenging words of justice and peace, we pray to the Lord ...

For the hand of God to touch the entire world and bring healing from the pandemic, we pray to the Lord ...

In thanksgiving for all medical care-givers: may God watch over them and keep them safe from all harm, we pray to the Lord ...

That each of us, leading the life to which God has called us, may strive to support one another in love, we pray to the Lord ...

For all who have died: may they enter joyfully into the kingdom of God, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

*In Christ your Son, O God, you impart to us
a new teaching from one who speaks with authority,
for Jesus is the unique master of wisdom.
Make us convinced and courageous in professing the faith,
so that by word and example we may proclaim the truth.
This we pray, this we seek, through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,

OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (**Celebrating the Word** was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).