

Gospel

Mark 1:21-28

Unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority

In St Mark's account of the good news of salvation, which we are following this year B of the three year cycle of Sunday Mass readings, Jesus begins his public ministry by teaching in the Synagogue in Capernaum. Capernaum is situated on the NW coast of the Sea of Galilee and it seems to be where Jesus settled after he left Nazareth where he had grown up.

What is interesting about Mark's recollection of this event is that he fails to mention WHAT it was that Jesus taught on that day. What Mark highlights is the personal impression which Jesus made on the congregation at Capernaum: "And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike their scribes, he taught them with authority." What authority?? Jesus of Nazareth didn't have any specific authority in First Century Palestine!!

It was the sheer presence and authority of his own person which made such an impression on the people. Our Christian faith is primarily faith in a person. This person is always simultaneously the Son of God and Jesus of Nazareth. It is this divine human personal presence which gains Jesus the traction with his audience which then finds them attentive to his teaching. And WHAT he teaches rings true because it flows from whom/who He is.

Am I saying that the teachings of Jesus are not important? Of course I'm not. Jesus himself says if you love me, keep my commandments. If you love ME, this Person, Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God, then follow my teachings.

As human beings, we crave being transported into the realm of the inter-personal. We thirst for truly inter-personal relationships with ourselves, with others and ultimately with God. And God himself is sheer Inter-Personal. God is Being itself - is existence itself - from whom we are all gifted our very existence as human beings. God is the set of relationships between the Divine Persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit - to the extent that none of the Divine Persons ever exists alone outside of their relationships between each other.

Therefore if as human persons, we crave the realm of the INTER personal, we ultimately crave God: Father, Son and Spirit.

In our prayer, do we take account of this divine presence? Do we begin by reminding ourselves that we are already in God's presence, that He is already fully conscious of us, even if we haven't given Him a second thought since the last time we prayed. When we come into the church and genuflect or bow before do we remind ourselves that Jesus Christ, truly divine and truly human, sacramentally truly present in the consecrated host in the tabernacle, is already infinitely aware of our presence and everything about us? Or do we immediately begin speaking AT God?

Saint Mark writes his gospel out of a sense of being awe-struck by the Person of Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One. He offers example after example of this anointed, healing, calming presence of our Saviour. In today's brief gospel, as he is teaching, Jesus' liberating presence turns attention to the demoniac and frees him with the simple command: "Be quiet! Come out of him!" (Addressed to the evil spirit)

Yesterday at Mass we heard Mark's account of Jesus calming of the storm at sea, with a similar simple command: "And he rebuked the wind, and said to the sea: 'Quiet now, be calm'" And Mark observes, "And suddenly there was a great calm."

Sometimes those of us who imagine we know more than the average punter can learn from allegedly simpler, less sophisticated folk who are, in fact more attuned, more intelligent in the inter-personal domain. (Think for example of the Down Syndrome people you have met and how they relate to themselves, others and God) And we are always in that domain: everything we do or say has an IP context, even when we are alone: GK Chesterton, the Catholic master of the paradoxical, wrote of that person who bothers me myself!! That nonsense riddle about cultivating a convivial relationship with myself, not treating my very own person or self as just another thing: "'Come sit down beside me' I said to myself, and although it doesn't make sense, as a small act of trust, I held my own hand, and together we sat on the fence"

According to that beautiful chant *Uni Caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*

Where there is charity and love, God is there ...

Where there is genuine love of self, others and God, Jesus Christ, God, is personally present with us in his Spirit.