

Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time  
February 4, 2018  
Deacon Nick Thompson

The last few Sundays we have seen Jesus baptized, he has announced the meaning and purpose of his work and he has called his first disciples. In today's Gospel reading we see him beginning that work. The Word of God spoken by Moses is being fulfilled. "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin; and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him." Jesus has appeared, a Jew of Palestine like all those around him. And he is a prophet in word and deed. Not in the sense of someone who can foretell the future but rather as one who speaks the word of God with authority. For that reason, he should be listened to.

Jesus, "the Word" begins to teach in Capernaum. The people are held spellbound because he speaks with authority, not like the scribes. A man comes before Jesus who is under the power of an unclean spirit in the hand of the power of evil. Jesus orders the unclean spirit to come out of the man. The bystanders are amazed because Jesus has such authority. What do we mean when we speak about the authority of the Lord? What do we mean when we talk about authority in general? What ways do we exercise authority? What ways do we exercise the authority of the Lord?

The word authority comes from the Latin word *auctoritas*. The basic meaning of this Latin word is *creator*. The word 'author' also comes from this word. A writer can look at his or her work, an essay, a short story, a novel, a poem, a non-fiction study, whatever, an author can look at this work and say, "This is my creation." The government recognizes that the author has rights over his or her creation. For someone to steal it and call it their own is plagiarism. When we talk about the authority of the Lord, we recognize that He is the Creator, or Author of the Universe. He has the power to govern the universe. Just as an author can determine what takes place in the short story he or she writes, God can determine what takes place in the universe He has created. This is what gives us the right to speak out to others in matters of faith and morals. As long as what we speak comes from God, it is not us but rather God who speaks.

When we talk about authority in general, we speak about the power a person has received to determine the actions of another person or a group of people. Society creates laws to protect its citizen and then gives authority to the police to enforce these laws. For example, we give the police the authority to stop our cars if we are driving at 54 mph on a street where the speed limit is posted as 40 mph. However, as the source of authority, we can change the laws. If we change the speed limit on the same road to 55 mph, the policeman no longer has the right to stop us if we are going 54 mph. In general, worldly authority given to man as a gift from God is intimately connected with its source. All authority is by nature transitional, that is, all authority except that authority which comes from the Lord. Prophets are listened to and have impact because God is the author of their message. They stray from the message and they are no longer akin to God. In the *Gospel of Mark*, the people were amazed because they had never experienced someone speaking with such authority. Jesus held people spellbound because as creator of the universe; he is the source of all truth, the ultimate authority. This authority can never be removed from Jesus because Jesus is one in Spirit, one in being with his Father.

We share in the authority of the Lord to the extent that we are united to the source of this authority. When we are baptized and confirmed we receive the power, the authority, to defeat evil in the world and to lead others to Jesus, the source of all truth. This authority is given to us by God. God can remove this authority and will remove this authority if we refuse to stay intimately united to him. I hope our young people who are studying to be confirmed, our parents who are responsible for directing their children in the light of Christ, and all of us, myself included, understand the gravity of this. God has entrusted us with his authority only to the extent that we allow him into our lives. We break God's law and we lose our rights. We separate ourselves from the truth. That is the reason why the Church is adamant that we attend Church regularly and receive the sacraments regularly. We need to have union with God, so we can bring his authority, his power to the world.

The crowd was spellbound because Jesus spoke with authority, not like the scribes and Pharisees. People are no different now than they were then. People want to hear the real Word of God and feel the presence of God in the words of the speaker. We the baptized can do this. We have the authority to do this. People can witness the Word of God present in our lives, and then choose to make the Word of God present in their own lives. We, anointed as priests, can do this. We can make Jesus' presence real for others. We have the authority to do this. People want to learn how to live their lives in such a way that when they conclude their lives they can stand before the Lord saying that they have made His Presence known in the world. We, anointed as prophets, can do this. We have the authority, the power, to form others into Christian leaders. We, anointed as kings, have the authority, the power of Jesus Christ if only we stay united to him. Today we bow down in worship to God and sing with the psalmist that without distraction we may remain united to the Lord, the rock of our salvation, the Lord who made us, the source of the power and the authority we have received.