

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 18:15-23; Psalm 95; 1 Corinthians 7: 17, 32-35; Mark 1: 21-28

Governments all around the globe are fractured. There is disagreement about power and authority. Today we hear of another authority, one that stems from the Spirit moving in the heart of Moses, and the prophet whom God will send who will be like Moses. In Jesus' day, there was political and religious turmoil much like our own time, a questioning of Roman and Herodian power, a problem with religious authority. The people were on the lookout for a "prophet-like-Moses" to lead them. Paul used his authority clearly, much like prophets who were/are so close to the mind and heart of God that they dare to speak in God's name. And like Jesus, Paul did not want us to be anxious. Jesus came preaching peace, and casting out demons of anxiety which literally convulsed people. Those who looked on "were amazed and kept asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching, one with authority?'"

Are there demons of anxiety in you (or even perhaps hatred) that you want Jesus to expel today? Hear Jesus say to you: "Be still" and to whatever binds you: "Come out of _____!" If the Spirit has not raised up any unfreedom in your memory for you to present to Jesus for healing, then consider the meaning and the value of power and authority in your own life. Whom do you follow? Why? When and how do you use power and authority?

Thank you, Jesus, for continuing day by day in ordinary time to set us free from demons, whether interior or familial or societal demons which bind us. Preach peace to our hearts, please, right now. We need your authority.

Monday, January 30, 2012

2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16: 5-13; Psalm 3; Mark 5: 1-20

Yesterday we focused on the demons which Jesus continues to cast out. In David's case, a man curses him. David, pursued by his own son Absalom in a grab for power, is weeping as he flees, and yet he sees the "enemy" who curses and throws stones at him as a possible messenger of God. In Mark, Jesus meets another wild man who curses and takes stones to gash his own body, so possessed by demons is he. Jesus is not afraid "although no one had strength to subdue the man."

Ponder in your heart any times in your life when you felt cursed and stoned by others. If the perpetrators are still alive, pray for them, and ask the Spirit if there is any message from God in their persecution of you. Listen. If they have died, speak to them directly. Perhaps more often we have gashed our own selves. When have you despised your self, cursed your self? Focus now on your self, flawed though it may be, as a temple of the Spirit, and the embodiment of Christ.

Christ Jesus, give us the grace and graciousness to pray for our enemies. They are yours, and often, you speak to us through their harshness. Free us from harshness toward our selves.

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14, 24-26, 30-19: 3; Psalm 86; Mark 5: 21-43

What a wonder is the love of a parent for a child! Parents more easily than others surely know how unconditional is God's love. It might not have cost Jairus, president of the synagogue, a lot to come to Jesus, begging for the life of his little girl. It cost David. How powerfully and unconditionally David loved his son Absalom, even when the young man raised an army against his father. News comes to David that Absalom has been killed. There is no relief in David, only grief. "Would that I would have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" In the gospel another character seizes center stage, a woman who must have been cut off from her children by a bleeding illness that would have isolated her from even her family. For twelve years she had been consulting physicians, but is healed by contact with Jesus.

How do you contact Jesus? When? Where? How? Although Jairus asks for help humbly and directly, this woman sneaks up behind Jesus. So sneak a peek every so often during the day; reach out and touch him. Often. Pray for parents and their children, especially those who rebel and those who are ill.

Jesus, thank you for your unconditional acceptance of us. How well you love us. Deepen our love for others, and teach us to love well. Give us the grace to pray for our enemies and wish them well.

Wednesday, February 1, 2012

2 Samuel 24: 2, 9-17; Psalm 32; Mark 6: 1-6

Joab, the very man who killed Absalom, now is sent by David to take a count of the people. This census angers God. "Put not your trust in numbers!" So David was "stricken to the heart," and was given three choices through the word of the prophet Gad. David chose a punishment of disease upon the people, rather than taking a punishment for himself alone. As with Bathsheba, David compounds his sin, first by sinning against Uriah, now against the 70,000 people who died of pestilence. Too late, David realizes how he has sinned, but he knows to whom to turn. The psalm acknowledges: "I confessed my sin to you; I did not hide my iniquity...and you forgave the guilt of my sin." Meanwhile, in Nazareth, Jesus is amazed at his own people's unbelief.

How long does it take you to get in touch with the sin in your life? Then what do you do? What unbelief in your own heart amazes you? Do not equate "belief" with church doctrine. Faith in biblical language means trust, clinging to God, committed to God. Confess your sin, your weakness, your shame, your guilt to Jesus. Promise to give him all your future worries, in trust.

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief! Forgive us. Free us from unnecessary shame and guilt, and help us to forgive those who hurt, gossip, trespass against us.

Thursday, February 2, 2012

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Hebrews 2: 10-11, 13-18; Psalm 24; Luke 2:22-40

The psalmist cries: “The king of glory enters!” The gospel paints the picture of baby Jesus presented in the temple. It is the Hebrews reading which teaches us a powerful theology. First, God is the one “for whom and through whom all things exist.” God is not a supreme being; God IS being. God is bringing many children to glory; that means us. Jesus is the source of our salvation, which we always knew, but what may surprise us is that “he was made perfect.” Jesus is in a life long process of becoming fully human and fully divine. Children share flesh and blood, and Jesus shares the same. Why is he flesh and blood? “So that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death...and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death...Therefore he [Jesus] had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest....”

What in the passage from Hebrews affirms your own belief? What stretches and challenges your faith? Now let’s get personal: what holds you in slavery? Has that freedom from the fear of death touched you yet? Flooded you? Ask for that grace.

By the mystery of water and wine, of flesh and blood, may we come to share the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity. Thank you for our faithful and merciful high priest!

Friday, February 3, 2012

Sirach 47:2-11; Psalm 18; Mark 6: 14-29

The gospel details the death of John the Baptizer through the machinations of Herodias and the weakness of Herod. Two kings are contrasted, for in Sirach we have a summary statement of the life and achievements of David, sinner though he was. First we hear of his military exploits, but more importantly, his prayer life and liturgical improvements in community worship. “David gave thanks...proclaimed God’s glory... sang praise with all his heart, and he loved his Maker. He placed singers at the altar to make music...and gave beauty to the festivals.”

Today you be the one to give thanks, proclaim God’s glory, sing praise with all your heart, make an act of love, sing a bit, and later, do something beautiful for God. Pray for all who are saddened by the changes in our liturgy, and pray that their creativity may find ways around what is not beautiful in our church. Pray for all those around the world who lead and govern, and that their military exploits may cease.

With all our hearts, our Creator, beloved Being living and loving through every piece of your creation, we praise you, give you thanks, worship and adore you!

Saturday, February 4, 2012

1 Kings 3: 4-13; Psalm 119; Mark 6: 30-34

We hear of David's son Solomon, who is asked by God: "What should I give you?" Solomon asks for an understanding mind, wisdom, the gift of discerning good from evil. God is pleased that he asks nothing for himself, and God does grant him "a wise and discerning mind." Jesus tries to offer us a method, a first step in discernment, reflection. Once again he and his disciples are so pressured they have no time to eat (cf Mk 3: 21). With that kind of stress a wise and discerning mind are difficult, so Jesus invites his friends: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." But the crowds capture him, and Mark comments: "he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd..."

Today's could be a three-part prayer. First, what do you want from God? Secondly, what pressures in your life keep you from healthy rest, food, recreation, and what will you do about it? Finally, what are your feelings when your day, your desk, your calendar, your highway is too crowded? Discuss your feelings with Jesus as today the two of you do go apart to rest.

We offer you our deepest desires, Jesus, and beg you to deepen our compassion, unity and peace. Make us peacemakers and heralds of your great desire that we may all be one.