

Commentary on the Readings for January 31, 2021

The 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever listened to someone give a talk or lecture where the message radiated from the whole person – the language, their personality, their voice, not just the subject? Perhaps that person was speaking of something new, or it could have been a subject that you were already aware of but, for some unknown reason, it suddenly becomes more clearly and thoroughly understood. The readings for this Sunday concern such a person who speaks “**with authority.**”

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of Deuteronomy (18:15-20 [71b])*. Here Moses, the most influential person of the Old Testament, is teaching his followers and the Jewish people about the future, and how they should conduct themselves in matters of faith and morals when they finally enter the Promised Land. He promises that God will send a great person, “... a prophet like himself” who will lead God’s people. Although this is referring to the prophets that God will send later, it cannot be overlooked that Jesus is the **ultimate** Prophet. Thus, Moses was referring to Jesus and instructing his people to pay attention and take what He says to heart. Moses spoke to his people *for* God whereas Jesus speaks to His people because He *is* God.

The **Responsorial Psalm (95:1-9)**, is a meditation on the events of the Israelites’ wandering in the desert. They grumbled and griped about Moses’ leadership and their own situation of having no water or fresh food, which was indicative of their lack of faith in God and in Moses. The whole psalm is an exhortation to “hang in there,” and to listen and obey the voice of God.

The **Second Reading** is from the *First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (7:32-35)*. This is a continuation of Paul’s letter read this week, in which he talks about getting distracted by things of “this world.” He is not making a case for the single life over the married life. Rather, he is pointing out that certain vocations or occupations present more of a distraction than others and we should guard against distractions that might prevent us from hearing God speak to us. Our spouses can be the instrument through whom God speaks to us. We must be alert to “hear His voice.”

The **Gospel Reading** is from the *Gospel of Mark (1:21-28)*. This is a brief but powerful portion of Mark’s gospel that illustrates two aspects of Jesus’ mission. He came to teach and to overcome evil, and He proves that with a powerful miracle. Jesus came to teach “with authority” – the authority of God – something new and refreshing to the soul. His voice and message had a power even over evil spirits, so why would we not want to listen and obey?

It is interesting that in St. John’s Gospel, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, says only five words: “Do whatever he tells you!” (John 2:5) Jesus was God! Whatever He said was an important message and whenever we hear it, even today, we should not harden our hearts and turn away. So, the question to ponder over this week is: **If you heard Jesus speak to you personally, what would you do?** Something to think about during your prayer time this week. **MFB**