

Homily. 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 27/28 January 2024.

Mark's gospel is a drama of deeds, feelings, reactions and responses where the actions always speak louder than the words. We haven't yet finished Chapter 1 and already we've heard that Jesus was baptised by John, spent time in the wilderness where he prayed and was tested, then travelled to Galilee to begin his preaching and called his first followers. All of this took the gospel writer just 20 verses to relate; a cracking pace.

Now, from verses 21 to 28, we hear that Jesus has gone to Capernaum, a fishing village and the home town of Simon Peter and Andrew. After a day or two there the Jewish Sabbath came round so he went to the local synagogue as practicing Jews did and still do. St. Mark lets us know that he was invited to take the teaching chair and that he impressed the locals with the authority of his words and wisdom.

All fine and dandy so far but not for very long as a disturbed man present began to shout out, upsetting proceedings considerably. The spirit in the man recognised that Jesus had power to heal and release him from his illness. It did so because it was able to see deeper into Jesus than others who recognised him only as an unexpected guest and impressive teacher from the Galilee hill town of Nazareth.

As we heard this unsettled spirit shouted out that Jesus of Nazareth was really the Holy One of God. This means that this spirit, threatened by Jesus power and authority, recognised that Jesus was the Messiah, God's man amongst us with divine power to heal, liberate and save.

Our own spirits and those of others can be disturbed as some of us have seen, felt and experienced. We've encountered angry, aggressive people, sad, distraught people, physically, mentally and spiritually sick and even unbalanced people. Some shout out their feelings, their pain; others collapse before us folding inwards like a withered leaf, and some froth at the mouth spitting out their indignation and vehemence. Humans are vulnerable beings and life can be cruel and unkind affair.

In such situations, with others and with us, too, when we feel out of kilter, possessed by an abnormal state and spirit of mind and heart, Jesus does not retreat. Rather, he steps forwards and towards us, speaking words of power and healing, delivering us from our torment and restoring us to our right and better selves. All of the healing professions aim for this restorative goal by one or other means of therapy. Aware of it or not, they are acting as Jesus did and as he wants. They're using something of the power and authority of the Gods holy One, making it available to us now.

Still, in this, Jesus remains unique as both the flowing source of all of our healing and the summit to whom we look in our sickness, distress and fear, for this is what the scene in the Synagogue reveals. Back then in Capernaum it led to his fame in Galilee. Today, it leads us to have faith in God's Holy and healing One. In itself this is more than enough to inspire us to give thanks to our God, just as we proclaim in the Preface that it is indeed right and just for us to do so, always and everywhere.