

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time – B  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Holy Family Catholic Church  
Kirkland, Washington  
28 January 2018

Deuteronomy 18:15-20  
Psalm 95  
1 Corinthians 7:32-35  
(Matthew 4:16) Mark 1:21-28

*Repent and Believe in the Authority of Jesus*

“The people [in the synagogue] were astonished at [Jesus’] teaching, for he taught...[with] authority.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps we’re wondering, *What was it about Jesus’ teaching that astonished them so much?* Mark didn’t provide any details about the content of Jesus’ teaching; we’re simply told that He taught and that they were astonished. And that’s the style of Mark’s Gospel. He doesn’t typically offer many details; he keeps the action moving at a quick pace.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, Mark’s point in this Gospel passage isn’t so much the content of Jesus’ teaching, as much as his point is to establish Jesus’ authority to teach. On the other hand, Mark doesn’t need to elaborate on what Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on that particular sabbath. We need only read a few verses before and recall what Jesus preached to us last Sunday, in the first words of His ministry in Galilee: “Repent, and believe in the gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

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In last week’s homily, I preached that to repent is more than just being sorry for our sins and making a good confession. To repent is “to change one’s mind”; to go in a different direction.<sup>4</sup> Repentance is leaving behind our sins,<sup>5</sup> and moving in the direction of following Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Repentance means turning away from the unclean spirits that all of us attach ourselves to, and allowing the authority of Jesus to drive them out of us. I don’t mean that we are all possessed by unclean spirits, as was the man who came into the synagogue on that sabbath.<sup>7</sup> I mean that all of us, in our own ways – big or small – allow ourselves to be attached to various unclean spirits. We allow unclean spirits to have some kind of authority over us, and those

unclean spirits cause us to resist following Jesus and to resist moving toward the holiness of God.<sup>8</sup>

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St. Teresa of Ávila, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic, and Doctor of the Church, wrote about her own experience of dealing with unclean spirits.<sup>9</sup> She warned that the assaults of the unclean spirits come with our own consent; that “[unclean] spirits keep us in [fear], because we expose ourselves to [their] assaults...by our attachments” to our sins.<sup>10</sup> She learned that by trusting in the authority of Jesus – rather than in our own power – we do not have to fear the unclean spirits. From then on, whenever she saw the unclean spirits, she “was never again afraid of them – on the contrary, [she was amazed that]<sup>11</sup> they seemed to be afraid of [her]. ...[And] with...authority over them, given by the Lord,” the unclean spirits were nothing more than flies that she could shoo away.<sup>12</sup> The lesson for us is that unclean spirits are *afraid* of us when we *do not fear them*.<sup>13</sup>

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One of the ways in which we turn away from unclean spirits and reduce our fear of them is to turn them over to the authority of Jesus by making good, regular confessions. I preached last week that hearing confessions is one of my favorite things about being a priest. It’s inspiring for me and strengthens my faith when I witness disciples following Jesus in a very concrete way: repenting of their sins and believing in God’s mercy and forgiveness. Allowing me, as a priest, to call on the authority of Jesus to forgive their sins through the words of absolution.

Another one of my favorite things about being a priest is celebrating the Mass and, in particular, a point in the Mass called the *Epiclesis*.<sup>14</sup> That is the moment when I extend my

hands over the offerings, the altar server rings the bells, and I call down the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine, so “that they become the Body and Blood of...our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

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A couple years ago, at the start of a new seminary year, Bishop Liam Carey of the Diocese of Baker in Oregon, preached to us at Mount Angel about the *Epiclesis*. He called all of us seminarians to be “Men of Epiclesis.” To be disciples who are committed to calling down the Holy Spirit – not just in the Mass – but in all parts of our lives. To be disciples who call on the authority of Jesus to drive out the unclean spirits.

In between those times of making a good confession, and in between those times when we gather together for Mass, all of us are called to be – all of us can be – “People of Epiclesis.” To be disciples who are committed to calling down the Holy Spirit in our lives. To help us turn away from unclean spirits that tempt us, and trust in the authority of Jesus to drive them out. This can be as simple as calling down the Holy Spirit: to help us say words of blessing and encouragement, when we are tempted to speak with the unclean spirit of cursing or anger.<sup>16</sup> Or calling down the Holy Spirit: to help us keep quiet, when we are tempted by the unclean spirit of gossip. Or calling down the Holy Spirit: to help us resist any other kind of vice or bad habit, when we are tempted by the unclean spirit of addiction or impurity.

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My friends, the battle plan is simple: call down the Holy Spirit and allow the authority of Jesus to drive out the unclean spirits. The execution, however, can be difficult: because we rely on our own power. Or we give up trying to resist the unclean spirits because of our attachments to them, or because we get confused, discouraged, or exhausted. Following Jesus takes effort on our part, and it takes commitment and it takes *recommitment* – again and again.

Today – and each Sunday – and *every* day – Jesus calls us to recommit to following Him. To *repent* by turning away from the unclean spirits. To *believe* that we can call on His Holy Spirit to drive out the unclean spirits. Jesus calls all of us to *repent* and *believe* and then to allow ourselves to be *astonished* and *amazed* by His authority!

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:22

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Felix Just, S.J., “The Gospel According to Mark: Literary Features & Thematic Emphases” at <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Mark-Literary.htm>

The Gospel of Mark is characterized by its Paratactic Style:

Parataxis: stringing together (lit. “placing next to”) short loosely connected episodes, like pearls on a string. An amazing 410 of the 678 verses in the original Greek version of Mark’s Gospel begin with the word “And” (Gk. *kai*)!

Immediacy: Mark’s Gospel emphasizes action, as seen in the frequent use of the Greek word *euthys* (“immediately, right away, at once, as soon as”), used an astounding 42 times, especially near the beginning of the Gospel. One could feel exhausted after reading Mark’s Gospel, so quickly does the action seem to occur!

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:15, from the Gospel of the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time - B

<sup>4</sup> *metanoēō* (μετανοέω) = “repent” as in Mark 1:15

*Strong’s Concordance* G3340: “to change one’s mind” or “to think differently”

*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the New Testament*: literally, “to perceive afterwards” (*meta*, “after,” implying “change,” *noeo*, “to perceive;” *nous*, “the mind, the seat of moral reflection”)...hence signifies “to change one’s mind or purpose,” always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and...of “repentance” from sin.

<sup>5</sup> CCC 1431-1432

*metanoia* (μετάνοια) = “repentance” as in Mark 1:4

*Strong’s Concordance* G3341: “a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done”

<sup>6</sup> Mark 1:17-18, 20

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:23

<sup>8</sup> See note for Mark 1:23 at <http://uscgb.org/bible/mark/1:21#49001023-1>:

An unclean spirit: so called because of the spirit’s resistance to the holiness of God. The spirit knows and fears the power of Jesus to destroy his influence.

<sup>9</sup> Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), also known as Saint Teresa of Jesus: Spanish Carmelite, initiated discolored Carmelite movement, prolific spiritual and mystical writer, first woman Doctor of the church [1970].

Proclaimed Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, 27 September 1970.

<sup>10</sup> Teresa of Avila, Ch XXV: *Divine Locutions – Delusions on that Subject* (para. 26)

<sup>11</sup> See Mark 1:27

<sup>12</sup> Teresa of Avila (para. 25)

<sup>13</sup> See Mark 6:50: “But at once [Jesus] spoke with them, ‘Take courage, it is I do not be afraid!’” (also see Matthew 14:27 and John 6:20)

<sup>14</sup> *Epiclesis* (ἐπίκλησις): from Greek *epi* + *kaleo* (ἐπί + καλέω); to call down upon

*Strong’s Concordance* G1909: *epi* (ἐπί): “a primary preposition; properly, meaning superimposition (of time, place, order, etc.), i.e. over, upon, at, on, towards, etc.”

*Strong’s Concordance* G2564: *kaleo* (καλέω): “to bid, call (forth)”

From Adrian Fortescue, “Epiclesis” in *Catholic Encyclopedia: Vol. 5* (1909):

Epiclesis (Latin *invocatio*) is the name of a prayer that occurs in all...liturgies...after the words of Institution, in which the celebrant prays that God may send down His Holy Spirit to change this bread and wine into the Body and Blood of His Son.

<sup>15</sup> *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer III No. 109

<sup>16</sup> See Ephesians 4:29-32: “No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.”