

Authority in His Word Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, June 28, 2014
8:15 AM Lam 2:2, 10-14, 18-19; **Mt 8:5-17** (Immaculate Heart of Mary; St. Irenaeus)
(This is the sort of faith that we have to make our own if we want to benefit from it, because that's the nature of faith.)

“When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

This is really quite a story, quite a statement from Jesus: “In all of Israel I have not found such faith.” Now did that include his mother? I don't know. But it's a statement that we need to think about. **What is this faith?** Well, it concerns **the observation of the centurion that he is under authority.**

What is authority? Authority in the world normally is **the power or the right to have someone do something or to require someone to do something.** For example, if you work for a living, your boss who pays your salary or your wages has authority to require you to do certain things. And if you fail to, well, then that same authority has a right to get rid of you, fire you. You have to be accountable to those who pay you for a job to do what you are paid to do. That's a kind of authority, worldly kind of authority. In families parents have authority over their children. This should mean that they guide and direct their children, not only feed them and care for them physically, but give them moral guidance. That's a kind of authority; it's also worldly actually. There's authority in government. A policeman has authority to tell you to go through a red light, or not to go even though the light is green. That's a kind of authority, or the authority to arrest you on suspicion of some crime, and so on. There's all different kinds of authority. **It always involves some kind of power over. Hopefully it's exercised for the common good, but not always.**

Now here the kind of authority or power exercised is over nature, over sickness; that's the point. Do we have authority over nature? Well, yes, you can see that too. Technology and science gives human beings a certain power over nature, sometimes used for the better and sometimes used for the worse, sometimes controversial. Are dams good or not? Some argue they are bad; some argue they are good. But making a dam is quite a project. It involves tremendous engineering, cooperation, expense, sometimes of human life.

But **this is about power over nature in the word of Jesus himself.** So this is not about some vast program involving many people, many minds, many limbs, a great deal of money. No, it's all about the word. He says, **"Say but the word and my servant shall be healed."** **And that's the faith Jesus is amazed at,** that this centurion believes Jesus has authority over nature in his very word, **which means that he is at least sent by God**—at least. That's the most minimal interpretation you can give. At least he is sent from God and has divine power. Later, of course, the Church will actually say Jesus is God. But here at least he is sent by God. The centurion is acknowledging that, which Jesus did not find in Israel, this faith that Jesus is sent by God and that by his very word he has power and authority over nature.

This is the sort of faith that we have to make our own if we want to benefit from it, because that's the nature of faith. It doesn't matter who Jesus was if we don't believe in him. It doesn't matter what Jesus can do if we don't believe in him, because it does depend on faith in large part; at least in this story it does. This servant was healed because of the faith of the centurion. And if we want to benefit from the power of Jesus, of Christ's word, we have to believe in it.