

Teaching with Authority Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B February 1, 2015
5:00 PM Vigil Mass Dt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 7:32-35; **Mk 1:21-28** (Is our work and our example a plus for the kingdom of God, or is it a minus?)

“The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not like the scribes.”

This is an important moment in the mission of Jesus when the people are sensing that he has authority in a way that the scribes do not. Now the scribes were the official recorders of Holy Writ. They were educated. They were commissioned, but the people didn't feel they had authority. So what is this all about?

I have had the experience talking to doctors where I felt, yes, this doctor really knows what he is talking about. I need a doctor who will not overlook something important, but not make a mountain out of a molehill either. Likewise with car mechanics. I don't know anything about a car, so I really look for someone that I can trust. I don't want something overlooked that will cause a breakdown later, but I don't want to pour a lot of money into an old car. So this is something intangible, but real and it gives a sense of confidence. That's what **the people were feeling about Jesus, confident. He knows what he is talking about. He is not going to misguide us. He is not going to mislead us.**

What did **the scribes** do? Well, they actually **were faithful copiers**; they copied what they read. Some people think that's authoritative, to copy what you have heard, to repeat what someone else said, but not here. The people don't believe scribes teach with authority. The scribes knew how to write Hebrew. Recently in Israel we met a very gentle man, a lovely man; he was a scribe; he had a beautiful pen. He spent all day copying Hebrew. He was very skilled. He was very competent. It's not easy to write Hebrew, especially in a beautiful way. So the scribes were not fools. **They were very educated people, but what they had was not authority.** What they had was expertise in grammar and spelling and calligraphy. That was their expertise, but that's not authority in a biblical sense.

So what is authority in a biblical sense? Well, **for Jesus authority was a personal knowledge—personal—knowledge of the Father.** How could he argue all the time with the Pharisees, with the rabbis, and tell them what God really intended? The only way he could do that is that **he knew the heart of the Father.** That's authority: knowing God in a personal way. And Jesus once even said **“Only the Son know the Father and anyone the Son wishes to reveal him.”** So **his desire was to share this knowledge of the Father, this authority with others.** He didn't want to keep it to himself. He wants others to know the Father, in fact, everyone to know the Father as he does.

However, he ran into walls: some people didn't want to hear; they didn't want to listen, and **they didn't want to learn. Why? Well, they probably thought they knew already.** So in a prayer you read in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, **“To you, O Father, I offer praise for what you have hidden from the learned and the clever you have revealed to the childlike.”** Now rabbis were very learned. They spent years memorizing the tradition of the

elders, later called the Halakhah. The scribes were also learned and clever, but Jesus didn't choose them for his disciples. **He chose unlearned, uneducated fishermen.**

What did they have? **They had a willingness to learn. They had humility.** Sometimes we don't appreciate how actually **courageous also they were**, at least in the beginning. Last week's gospel, which ends right before this one starts says that "they left their fathers and their nets." Now that's pretty courageous. That means they left their families and their employment. **They were willing to leave what they knew and depend on Jesus for everything**, including their food, because they sensed something in him. **They sensed this authority** too. And they didn't just sense the authority that the crowds did, but **they decided to commit themselves.** That's what makes a disciple, an intentional commitment.

So we have the crowds. They sense Jesus is very special, but they don't really commit themselves to him. We have the demons who know exactly what Jesus is and who flee. And then we have **the disciples**, and they actually commit themselves to him, to Jesus, and to his work. Jesus' work was beginning to share his authority with them, and **he wanted to share his authority with them.**

And he wants to share his authority with you, with everyone who wants to follow him and be committed to him. So this invitation now is extended to you in the hearing of the gospel. That is exactly what Mark intended his listeners to understand.

And whether we like it or not and whether we are aware of it or not, **we are actually all teachers in some way or another.** Adults always teach children just by their example; by their very manners they teach something. Managers and supervisors teach others the way of managing and supervising, but do they do so in a Christlike way? That's a question. **We teach others by the way we treat them and the way we deal with conflicts and disappointments and failures.** But the question is: **Are we teaching with authority? Are we using Jesus as our model teacher? Are we following with our example what he taught? Are we passing on what we have learned from him? That is the question of today's gospel. Is our work and our example a plus for the kingdom of God, or is it a minus?** We have to think about this. If it is not a plus, if our example to the world is not teaching with authority, then how do we expect the kingdom of God to come?