

Sunday January 31st, 2021

Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Reflection

By: Jonathan Tucker

Life seems to be pretty normal for the people in the Capernaum synagogue that we visit in today's gospel reading. As readers, we see the end from the beginning in just 10 sentences. But for those present, there was so much more to the day. Events would need to play themselves out to become apparent. Little could they imagine that they would come face to face with the one prophesied generations earlier by Moses himself in Deuteronomy.

What followed in a matter of minutes would become an unforgettable memory for all present. For some, it would change the course of their lives.

That had already been the case for his followers who were present with him that day. Their experience with the Messiah had been relatively recent. Mark recounts in prior verses, what they had come to know of Jesus and his teaching. He had introduced Simon, his brother Andrew, James and his brother John to a parallel universe, the kingdom of God. And Jesus' offer, to come after me and I will make you become fishers of men. It was an intriguing and compelling invitation. But it came at a price: Self-examination, repentance, faith, and obedience to the Savior. Through Jesus' Teaching they came to understand that to repent and believe the gospel were keys to unlock the doors of God's kingdom.

Perhaps a reading, like today's reading, from the Psalter had preceded Jesus' teaching. Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD... Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving... Come let us bow down in worship... For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds. Such a reading would have been a fitting introduction for the Holy One of God.

As Jesus began his teaching the reaction was swift. The people responded in astonishment, Mark writes. He does not elaborate on Jesus' message. He has already conveyed it through the stories and encounters set out in the previous verses. The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel. Come after me and I will make you become ...

He taught as though God himself was in their presence, speaking to them. They spoke among themselves struggling to grasp and make sense of Jesus' words. So powerful and authoritative his message that even demons incarnate emerge, revealing a universe in epic conflict. Pain and torture – this veil of tears - laid bare for all present to see. Jesus responds with a mere command; Quiet! Come out of him! With that a captive is freed; to choose between good or evil once again. He now is liberated to choose – to repent or not.

Such was the intensity of events that day in Capernaum's synagogue; captured in just eight verses.

St. Mark gives his observation of the effect that this and other encounters with Jesus had subsequently; ...His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee. But even he could not imagine the timelessness of Jesus' teaching and authority. Two millennia later we find ourselves its beneficiaries; to let it challenge and provoke us to ongoing self-examination, repentance, and faith in all the areas of our lives. Daily. As we do, the testimony of Jesus' followers who have gone before us remind us that if we come after Him, his spirit will indwell us and transform us into people of more significance and purpose than is possible to imagine.