

## **The Inclusive Community**

### **Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**February 1, 2009**

**Homily of Anthony T. Padovano**

#### **Perceptions of Presence**

**Mark1: 21-28**

**A number of years ago not long after my ordination, if I were to preach this passage, I would have developed different themes. I would have stressed:**

- 1. Authority: Mark tells us Jesus taught with authority. I might have added that the Catholic Church does also.**
- 2. Obedience: The proper response to authority, from God or church, is obedience. I might have noted that Mark says Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, so we must go to church on Sunday.**
- 3. Proof: This passage is the way Jesus sets out to prove something, that he is the Messiah and the Son of God by his expulsion of a demon, by his fame, by his authority.**

**I am glad you did not know me then.**

**A number of years later, after pastoral experience, marriage, and after the friendship and faith we have shared in the Inclusive Community, I would develop very different themes. Issues of authority, obedience and proof are not absolutely unimportant but they do not engage me. They do not get my attention because they do not meet my needs, our needs. The way you need God or Christ or community in your life teaches me about what the Spirit of God wants us to see and follow.**

**So what do I see in this passage now? I see three different themes. Not authority, obedience and proof but the eagerness of Jesus to help us out of what we do not know (our ignorance) and to release us from our demons (all that diminishes our life) and to heal our pain (illness). I think that Jesus did not intend to prove his authority and identity but to reveal himself as a healer of our ignorance, our demons and our disease.**

**Let us take these items in turn:**

## **I. Jesus the Teacher**

**In Mark's Gospel, in the first chapter, Jesus has four followers: Peter and Andrew, James and John. We saw this last week.**

**Mark presents, in today's passage, the first public action of Jesus. In Mark's words "he entered the synagogue and taught."**

**Jesus is not fulfilling an obligation to worship. He was not rushing to get to Mass, so to speak. He wanted to teach.**

**Mark does not tell us what Jesus said but we know. We know because the rest of the Gospel tells us what he taught.**

**He taught that God loves us and that we were not created to be obedient but to be loved. God loves us and made us free and worthy and good in our very roots. Grace is in the DNA of our life. Not a thing we do is unimportant and trivial. A mother does not find a single thing an infant does unimportant or trivial. Love does not discount or disregard the words and actions of those we love. God is like that. No lily of the field in all its beauty, no bird in flight in all its freedom, no field of wheat in all the promise of bread it offers, no cluster of grapes in all its potential for wine, none of this, none of the miracles of life and of the cosmos, none of them, is more than you.**

**Jesus, the teacher, took away the unworthiness of our neglected lives, the irrelevance of our disvalued presence. Nothing makes us feel more valued than to know we are loved.**

**Jesus taught us that. It was his first public act, Mark tells us.**

**His authority came from addressing our needs. From seeing them. From healing them.**

## **II. Jesus the Liberator**

**It is not the bondage of others which shackles us. It is the prison we make of our own lives. Those who seek to dominate us are eager to keep all the doors we have shut on our own lives closed and locked.**

**Once we make a prison of our own lives, all that enters our cells are the demons: the demons which convince us we are better off isolated, unseen, insignificant. The demons convince us we have nothing to say of any value, that we make no difference in the world. The prison becomes the home we deserve.**

**Jesus the liberator broke the locks, opened the doors, cut the shackles. There is no prison for the daughters and sons of God. There is instead a kingdom, the reign of God. Jesus took us by the hand into the sunlight. This is where the lilies and the birds and the wheat and the vineyards belong. We were made for sunlight. The light banishes all demons.**

**Mark tells us the man in the synagogue of Capernaum, the man with the demon, screamed out and was convulsed. Jesus quiets him so that now he can speak and know that people want to hear him.**

**The word “obedience” comes from the Latin word “to listen.” The obedience Jesus teaches us is the obedience of God who wants to hear our voice and the obedience of each of us who wants to hear the words of God in our hearts.**

### **III. Jesus the Healer**

**In the verses which immediately follow today’s passage, Jesus begins healing the sick. At sundown, on the same day, when the Sabbath was over, the crowds came and he healed them.**

**One of the first images we have of our mother is that she heals us. One of the best images we have of our partner or spouse is that this person heals us of our loneliness and fear and despair.**

**It is impossible for love not to heal. A church that cannot heal does not love.**

**And, so, I am glad you did not know me then. I was eager then to understand authority and obedience. Eager to use Scripture as proof and, of course, obligation. Holy days of obligation we used to say. Easter duty. Was there every a more inept oxymoron than Easter duty?**

**Today, I affirm Jesus the teacher, Jesus the liberator, Jesus the healer. A God who did not miss me or miss you, a God who did not overlook us or disregard us is the only God worth knowing, the only God there is.**