

ST. THOMAS INDIAN MISSION

4th Sunday
in Ordinary Time, B
January 31, 2021

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Fr. George "of the desert" Decasa
Pastor

For the time being, our Sunday Masses are held outdoors, by the Parish Hall, on Saturdays at 4:30 PM and on Sundays at 8:30 AM. Please come in a face mask and observe social distancing (6 ft. between people of different households).

Due to an unavoidable circumstance, the 8:30 AM Mass today is cancelled.
— Fr. George of the Desert

1st Reading:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Moses spoke to all the people, saying: “A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen. This is exactly what you requested of the LORD, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let us not again hear the voice of the LORD, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die.’”

And the LORD said to me, ‘This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.

Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it. But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die.”

The Word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm:

“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; let us acclaim the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R.

Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice: “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the desert, Where your fathers tempted me; they tested me though they had seen my works.” R.



2nd Reading:

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Brothers and sisters: I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided.

An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit. A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction. *The Word of the Lord.*



Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!”

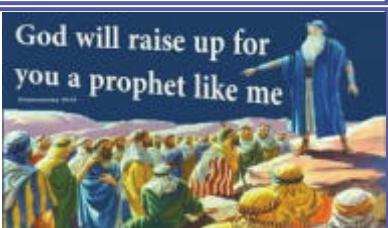
Jesus rebuked him and said, “Quiet! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.”

His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

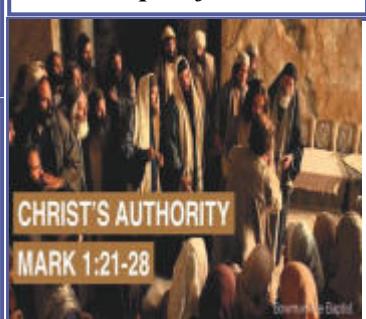
Lector: Alleluia, alleluia.
All: Alleluia, alleluia.

Lector: The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen. All: Alleluia, alleluia.



ACCLAMATION:

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again.



REFLECTING ON THE WORD . . . GUIDEPOSTS

JESUS INVITES US TO BE PROPHETS TO OUR WORLD TODAY.

The Gospels of the past two Sundays – that is to say, the second (Jn 1:35-42) and the third (Mk 1:14-20) Sundays of the year – showed us Jesus' call of his first disciples. The Gospel of today -- the fourth Sunday of the Year – moves to the next step: Jesus' first teaching which carries a unique authority not seen or heard before. After teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, the people are astonished. They cannot but express their marvel: "What is this? A new teaching with authority" (Mk 1:27).

As teachers or preachers, the scribes or the scholars of the law in Jesus' time would point to the revered *rabbis* of Israel whose interpretations of the Torah would be traced back to the authority of the prophets, the first and the greatest of whom was Moses. A prophet speaks in the name of the Lord. His words are God's words. A prophet must speak what God tells him, nothing more, and nothing less. Whoever hears a prophet, hears God. On the other hand, no prophet must dare say anything God has not told him to say. Otherwise God will punish him.

Jesus does not refer to the authority of the rabbis or the prophets before them, not even to Moses. Unlike Moses and all the other prophets after him who would preface their remarks with the phrase, "*Thus says the Lord,*" Jesus would declare, "*I say to you . . .*" or unlike the rabbis who would say, "*It has been said . . .*" (i.e., by God through the prophets), Jesus would say, "*I say . . .*"

Jesus' word is "new" because he teaches with his own authority. His *exousia* (power and authority) comes from his very person as the Son of God. As Son, he alone truly knows God. As Jesus himself says: "*I and the Father are one*" (Jn 10:30). As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews explains: "Moses, the greatest of the prophets, was faithful in all God's house as a servant, but Christ was faithful as a *son placed over his house*" (Heb 3:5-6).

The promise of a "new Moses" (Dt 18:15 – today's first reading) finds its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ. As today's first reading tells us, in Israel no one was like Moses. But Moses himself declares that God will raise a prophet not only like him but even greater. His prophecy finds fulfillment in Jesus. Thus Moses says: "To him (Jesus) you shall listen."

Jesus and his Spirit enter into us through our baptism and this presence is nurtured through this Eucharist that we celebrate today. He invites us to allow him to speak through us, to act through us, to show concern for others and the whole world through us. In other words, Jesus invites us to be prophets to our world today.



BACKGROUND TO THE FIRST READING

Some background to the first reading will be helpful. The setting is on the East side of the Jordan River. God's people had finally arrived at the Promised Land after several generations of slavery in Egypt and a long journey through the desert. Moses knew that God was calling him to leave this world and God's people would cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land without him. So, basically, Moses is saying "goodbye." He assures them God would not leave them without direction or leadership. God would send them another prophet like himself who would speak God's word to them.

We usually think of a prophet as a person who foretells the future and sometimes the prophet did, but the essential definition of a prophet is at the end of today's first reading: *one who speaks God's word*. Our first reading prepares us for the gospel where Jesus speaks God's word with power and authority.

THERE IS POWER IN A NAME.

It was the belief of the Jews that demonic forces could try to gain power over an enemy by uttering their name.

In today's gospel, the unclean spirit revealed that it knew who Jesus was. This implied that the unclean spirit would have power over Jesus. Normally the one attempting to drive out the demonic spirit would respond with the name of one more powerful. But Jesus had no need to do this. He just rebuked the unclean spirit and ordered it to leave---which it did. This was an unusual display of authority. Jesus preached on his own authority, and even the unclean spirit, although it knew who Jesus was, had no power over him.

Jesus the Word had the authority that Moses prophesied, the authority the unclean spirit obeyed, the authority the people of Capernaum recognized.

Jesus' word still has that power today—the power to heal people of the unclean spirits that afflict them, when that word or good news comes not just from our vocal cords but from Jesus and His Spirit in our being, in the manner described by St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This means we must appropriate God's word personally. More broadly, this reminds us that the word of God is intended to change us, to transform our minds and hearts and lives. **Questions to ponder:** Do I really expect to be changed in some way every time I come to Mass/worship? Am I open to whatever transformation God wants to create in me?

BACKGROUND TO THE SECOND READING

There is a need too to give a background about the second reading as it might be difficult to understand. The passage comes from a section of the letter of Paul where he replies to several questions he received in a letter from the Corinthians. Paul begins by affirming the value of marriage and then he moves on, which is today's reading, to affirm the value of celibacy. He is not making a rule, but a suggestion to those who were not yet married or who were widowed and he points out the advantages of remaining in such a state (i.e., unmarried). Why? Paul as did most of the first Christians, early on believed that Jesus would return within their lifetime.

Most of us have pondered what would we do if we knew the end was coming soon. Paul answered the question: stay focused on holiness, that is, on Christ. Paul is not making marriage second best to celibacy; rather, he is saying to stay as focused as you can on Christ. It is not that marriage distracts couples from Christ; it is that marriage requires spouses to pay attention to each other, and they should. To quote what Paul said in last week's second reading: "the time is running out" and "the world as we know it is passing away."

A REMINDER RE CORONA VIRUS:

When should I quarantine for the coronavirus disease?

- * You were within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more.
- * You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- * You had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them), even for a few seconds.
- * You shared eating or drinking utensils.

Do I still need to quarantine after I tested negative for COVID-19 but was exposed to someone who has COVID-19?

Yes. You should still self-quarantine for 14 days since your last exposure. It can take up to 14 days after exposure to the virus for a person to develop COVID-19 symptoms. **A negative result before end of the 14-day quarantine period does not rule out possible infection.** By self-quarantining for 14 days, you lower the chance of possibly exposing others to COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself and others is to stay home for 14 days if you think you've been exposed to someone who has COVID-19.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

CELEBRANT:

In Jesus' name, we now cry out to God with the needs of the church and the whole world.

LECTOR:

- 1) For the Church, that by what we say and what we do we may teach what we believe and witness how it changes our lives, so that we may bear witness to the saving power of God, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- 2) That those in authority may work toward bringing justice to all who are oppressed and peace to all who live in fear, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- 3) As we begin Catholic Schools Week, we pray for teachers, administrators, and staff in Catholic schools, that they may form each of their students into a person who will live out the values of our shared faith . . . that schoolchildren know the joy of learning in a safe environment, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- 4) That each of us be the voice of Jesus in the world today, speaking his word of healing to all whom we meet, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- 5) For those most affected by the winter cold . . . for the elderly, those who are homebound and those who live on fixed incomes . . . for those who work outside . . . for those with colds and flu . . . for the poor and those without homes, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- 6) For those who are sick or in pain, for those suffering with depression, anxiety and other conditions that make it difficult to cope with day-to-day life, *let us pray to the Lord.*

CELEBRANT:

Lord God, listen to our prayers and make us worthy followers of your Son. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

PLEASE HELP TO COMPLETE OUR ACA ASSESSMENT

FOR 2021— Pick up an ACA brochure. Fill in the Pledge form at the bottom of the brochure to indicate your Total Pledge for the year 2021 that you will pay in full by Dec. 31, 2021. Drop the filled in form in the Sunday Collection basket or mail it to St. Thomas Indian Mission, P.O. Box 1176, Winterhaven, CA 92283. Or, you may do it online.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

One beautiful Sunday morning, a pastor announced, "My good people, I have here in my hands three homilies: a \$1000 homily that lasts five minutes; a \$500 homily that lasts 15 minutes; and a \$100 homily that lasts a full hour. Now, we'll take the collection and see which one I'll deliver.



COLLECTIONS FOR PARISH SUPPORT:

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Via Online: Jan. 19-24, 2021: **\$405**

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