

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (January 29, 2012)
Year “B”
POWER

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

I Corinthians 7: 17, 32-35

Mark 1: 21-28

Introduction

Communist China’s Chairman Mao once made the statement that “Power comes out of the barrel of a gun.” Sadly, that is the image of power that many people have. All of us have felt the impact of power in one way or another. Maybe we got into trouble in school and were told to report to the Principal. There we met one form of power. As adults we have experienced in different ways the political power of government. Today the fifty largest business corporations in the world possess more economic power than do most national governments. Today’s Gospel speaks about power. We are told that Jesus taught “as one having authority”. The word used actually means “power”. This is an occasion to see what the Gospel teaches us about power.

In Jesus the Power of God is Present Among Us

The Shrine at Lourdes in France was the place where a young girl, Bernadette Soubirous, claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin. St. Bernadette is a great example of the power of God at work. She had little education. The local police inspector, the local Pastor, and the Local Bishop were all convinced she was either mistaken or mad. Yet her own holy life afterwards, her eventual canonization, and the events that have taken place at Lourdes for more than 150 years, show that the power of God was at work in that little girl.

In today’s Gospel, St. Mark wants us to see that power of God at work in Jesus. Even the evil spirits fled in face of it. That power is available to us and we need to count on it. Today many people are afraid to make a commitment for life in marriage or the priesthood or religious life. They ask: “How can I be sure I will be able to live up to my promises?” Many other people are hesitant about putting the teachings of their faith first when it comes to business dealings or to the way they live their married life. How can they live up to what the Church teaches? Yet we can do all these things by the power of Christ who lives among us in the Church. We experience that power in the words: “I absolve you from your sins”, “This is my Body”, “May Almighty God bless you.” Jesus is the power of God here to sustain us.

Jesus Used Power as a Form of Service

How often we speak in our society about getting even with people, and making people pay for what they have done. What should really strike us is the fact that Jesus, the God of all power, used power, not to tear down but to build up. Even John the Baptist was surprised by this. He thought the promised Messiah would come and pass swift judgment on everyone. Instead Jesus came declaring the present time as a time of mercy. He, the God of power, used his power to save. One of the most important statements in the N.T. is Jesus’ declaration: “The Son of Man came, not to be served but

to serve.” A servant is someone who has no one under them, no one to order around. To use whatever power we have as a form of service is to use it without any sense that there is someone under us, someone subject to us in any way.

Jesus Used Power in a Way That Respects Human Freedom

If we have ever had any kind of advantage over others whether physical, intellectual, or social, then we have had the temptation to be a bully, to force people in some way. In today’s Gospel it is the unclean spirits that act like bullies. Jesus never bullied people. He never forced anyone to accept him. The first three chapters of St. Mark’s Gospel, from which we are reading on these Sundays, are filled with his amazement that the religious leaders, the intellectuals, and even some of Jesus’ own family, were blind to who he was. Yet Jesus never did anything to force them. As we know so well, he even allowed himself to be unjustly condemned, scourged and crucified. His appeal was to the minds and hearts of people. He used the power of truth and the power of love. It was his teaching and his Person that won people over. St. Thomas Aquinas defines law as a directive of reason. Good law is not primarily a form of imposing one’s will on another but of appealing to the reason of others. In our daily life we need always to remember that we are dealing with free and responsible human beings. We should never underestimate the power of ideas or the power of love to persuade others.

Conclusion

There is a scene in the Gospel where we are told that a certain woman sought only to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment because she saw that “power went out from him to heal all.” It should never cease to amaze us that we can do far more than touch the hem of the Lord’s garment. We actually receive him in the Holy Eucharist. Truly the power of God is here to sustain us.