

Grace, Mercy, & Peace from God our Father & our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

At some point in my life I learned that saying what you think is not always the best way forward. A great many people never seem to learn this lesson, and doubtless some would say I haven't yet really learned it. Saying what you think can be pretty dicey. When you commit to what you think people can disagree with you, dislike you, avoid you; in Jesus' case it gets Him hung on a cross.

Realizing that sharing what I think or don't think, like or don't like, believe or don't believe, can make people embraced or not embrace me; more importantly at the time, it could be the difference between being or not being invited to birthday parties. Talking about what other people like, think, and believe is a safer bet than revealing what I like, think, and believe. *It's safer to say what you know than to say what you actually think.*

Asking what others think, listening and nodding, and talking what other people said, did, and thought made you more widely accepted. You can be an "authority" on a subject without ever having to venture an opinion. Because *being an "authority" means knowing what everyone else says and thinks without having to commit to what you think.*

Mark's gospel and our reading this morning center around the word, "authority." People are astounded because *Jesus' teaches "as one having authority."* The question before us then: **"Being and authority" and "having authority," are they the same thing?**

Apparently not! Because Jesus speaks with “authority,” which surprises and astounds people, while the Scribes and Pharisees were authorities on the Scriptures, which doesn’t seem to make much of an impression. This distinction between being “an authority” and “speaking with authority” is critical for us as people of God to understand.

The Scribes and Pharisees knew a lot about Scripture. In fact, the scope of their knowledge as experts on the Torah meant knowing what many different rabbis’ opinions on Bible texts and topics. They are authorities because they know the rules and the distinctions in the rules; “*authority*” actually derives directly from the the French “*autor*” meaning “*rule maker*”. So they know a lot about the rules – basically who shouldn’t be where, when and how.

Jesus is different. He not only knows all the rules and when and how to apply them, Jesus also knows when and how not to apply them – because their His rules. He apparently doesn’t give “the rules” final authority. Don’t get me wrong. *Jesus*’ knew the law, and *spent His life living under the Law*, but for Jesus there was something more important than the law – the rules: the will of the God, what the Father wants. ***The account in the synagogue in Capernaum demonstrates this difference.***

Being the gentiles that we are, we don’t find the scene in our gospel disconcerting or troubling, but the Jews of Jesus’ day would have been on edge. You see, a man with an unclean spirit would

have been anathema in the synagogue because the law didn't allow unclean things in clean places or mentally ill people in the synagogue. *Their first instinct – actually their only instinct – would have been to get the man with an unclean spirit out of the synagogue* as quickly as possible, and then ritually re-purify the defiled place.

But clearly Jesus doesn't do this. Jesus doesn't throw the man with an unclean spirit out of the synagogue, He throws the unclean spirit out of the man. Jesus doesn't simply follow the rules to avoid an forbidden situation, he restores things to wholeness. Jesus casts out the unclean spirit, a healing. And yet, the people speak of “a new teaching with authority.” The man is more important than the “unclean spirit.”

Fortunately, God, Father , Son, and Holy Spirit continue to hold the same position, because the LORD counts us as more important that our transgressions and uncleanness.

Ironically, the Scribes and Pharisees for all their expertise in interpreting the Scriptures, end up focusing on human convention rather than what the God of the Old Testament wants for God's people.

- The first learning: **people matter more than principles;**
- In God's house **we are concerned for the wholeness of all people no matter how the world may see them;**
- All the **knowledge and opinions of humanity mean nothing next to what God wants;**

- We are **called to live under Jesus' authority** – His new teaching – rather than to “be authorities” in the world;
- In Holy Baptism the **Holy Spirit empowers us to do the Father's will**;
- **Jesus demonstrates the Father's will.** When push comes to shove and you're torn between what people say Jesus says and how you know Jesus lived: follow Jesus' example.
- Finally, despite anyone's opinion to the contrary – even your own – **you are precious to God**, and Jesus wants you to know wholeness. And whatever the unclean spirit may be, Jesus has the power and desire to cast it out of your life.

And *while saying what I think may not necessarily be the best way forward, in this case it is* – not because I say it or think it, but ***because Jesus demonstrates it with authority in His life and on the cross.***

AMEN !!