

4TH SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY 01/28/18

Mt. Calvary, West View / Pentecost, Avella

DEUTERONOMY 18: 25-20, CORINTHIANS 8:1-13, MARK 1: 21-28

Theme: Authoritative Commands are Good

**+ Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
AMEN +**

Our Text is taken from the continuation of St. Mark's Gospel, the 1st chapter:

and [the unclean spirit] 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." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him

Our country has a freedom problem. Does that concern you? It should considering that our very first amendment right is, as everybody knows and is well reminded these days, the right to freedom of speech. Yet, there is the first part of that amendment that also is uniquely tied to this country's freedom of freedom of religion. We also have the freedom to assemble, freedom to proper press reporting, and the freedom to petition to our government to look into things we may feel a grievance to.

Yet, I submit to you, that these were not the concern of our country when the constitution was formed. What we were concerned about on September 17, 1787, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, was the administration of the Government of our thirteen and growing states. We had a constitution of what constitutes the Legislative branch, the executive branch, the Judicial branch, the relationships of these independent states, issues of the national debt, the supremacy of the Federal laws, and the oaths of offices. That is it. Did I miss anything? Did you even know this from your government class?

So then, since there is an appalling lack of concern for the people of which this constitution is to protect, we are allowed to *amend* the constitution. We can *control* the authority as it were to fit our

collective needs, and on the fourth of March, 1789, just 1,629 days into this great American experiment, we start the controlling concept of our government, to give us our God-given rights to freedom of speech and religion and the right to assemble ó and in just 28,035 days, on December 6, 1865, we extend it to former slaves, unless you live in Mississippi, who never ratified said amendment, and just 46 days later from there, it covers every national born citizen. That's right. 28,081 days to give you that wonderful freedom you have, to express yourself as an American citizen. Ah, yes, the wheels of justice turn slowly, but at least they turn.

My point in this Governmental history lesson, is that as a country, we seem to be more and more against governmental authority, so much so that we have made it increasingly harder for even the local governments to do their job. With respect to the police officers working the foot-beats, we believe the perpetrator before the officer; with respect to the social security personnel, we argue that they are incompetent and need to give us our welfare checks; with respect to our teachers, we demand that they stop picking on our child and give him the better grade he deserves; after all, if the teacher did a better job my kid would be smarter, right? [I Wonder how that works in home schooling.]

The Scribes and the Pharisees were the teachers of Jesus' day. Apparently, their authority was not as well received as Jesus' was. Scripture states, *“They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”* How are we to look at this? Well, in the good old days, the scribes would take his class and tell them what was written in the Torah ó that is the first five books of the Bible, the Nevi'im ó the books of the prophets, and the Ketuvim ó the other writings, all which make up the *Tanach*, the Hebrew Bible and then off on all the other oral teachings of the various rabbis over the centuries concerning this passage. Given this insight, you can see the problem here. We have the Word of God written down, but not much in way of other teachings. They were oral in nature, no Talmud, no Misnah, no Haggadah, no Midrash. All of these are well after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. Perhaps this is why they felt they need to start writing stuff down.

Now this method of teaching is not entirely wrong. After all, Moses gave us God's Word that revealed to us that the Great prophet would come from our midst and be one of us. So, reviewing those who have come before gives us insight to see if indeed they are the Messiah which is promised. But the issue is, the teachings, the Authority. It is very much akin to the Roman Catholic understanding that you as a lay person cannot be trusted with the Word of God but need the priest, the Cardinal, the Pope to tell you what it means, so that you do not mess up a good thing ó I mean, not misunderstand the Church's teaching. Jesus does not refer to councils, or popes, or any other authority, much as Martin Luther once said, "I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other." Jesus speaks the Word all alone; He needs not ask or prove verification by man.

So, the people understand His authority, but more than that, so do the demons in our text, *and [the unclean spirit] 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.'* With this, we see that even the demons recognize Jesus's authority, and they too, try to resist it. Their response is actually a plea to not be destroyed even though they know it will happen! Matthew in the 8th chapter records the demonic crying out *"Have you come here to torment us before the time?"* they know there is a time for their freedom to invade the lives of God's creation is to end, and they know the end comes when He comes to bring the new heavens and the new earth. They are much wiser than us in this regard.

But as for the resistance, the rebel forces that hate authority, and especially those that rebel against Jesus's rule, well, there is just no fight there. Jesus is the ultimate authority, evidenced in His teachings. He refers to none other than Himself to understand the message, *"Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."* As for the demons that refuse to repent, Jesus has a message for them, *"Be silent, and come out of him!"* They may convulse, that may cry, they may wail, but they WILL obey.

So where does that leave us? We have a rebellious streak as well. We sin daily and in our sin we tell God we do not like His authority. We want to lead our own lives; we want to tell God how to run His

world; we want to make our own determinations as to what is right and wrong. Ask Mr. Nassar what he thinks is right and wrong. I am sure he had no thoughts of wrong-doings before this year. That is a very extreme example to be sure, but every sin, no matter how small or white is simply a desire to control our own lives and not let God be God. Even when we tell the officer we had no idea how fast we were going, when we really know, is against God's wonderful authority that makes us trust Him above all things. We sin because we trust our authority over God's.

When God makes Commands, especially when we find them in the Ten Commandments, we need to repent and recall that they are really for our Good. They keep society in check, they reveal to us our sins, so we can repent and be saved, and they give us a guide to ask God, "What can I do for you today?" Nikkie loves to give me a "Honey-Do" list. As children of the heavenly Father, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ shed from the cross of Calvary, we have a honey-do list as well, spoken by God Himself found in every Word of the Holy Scriptures. Sure, we have the freedom to eat whatever we want, with moderation of course. Look at the example of Saint Paul. He surmises. "If what I eat causes a fellow Christian to become weak in the faith, well then, I won't eat it." My Christian freedom is the same. All things are permissible to me, yet not all things are profitable. If what I do causes someone to sin, I must stop, so as to help and be of service to my neighbor. I can do without, for my God saves me. With Baptism I am saved, with His Body and Blood from the cross all my sin are covered, and because of this, my suffering is small compared to the stumbling of my neighbor. So let us work together for good. Let us preach not teachings of men, but of God, the most important being, Jesus has died and rose again to be our Savior. His authority is not a bad thing, so let us follow Him. In His most Holy Name we pray.
AMEN.

+ AND NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN UNION WITH CHRIST JESUS. AMEN+

Offering / Prayers

There are only two days on my calendar...today and the day of judgment