

4 OT Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebration summary by Dale J. Sieverding: With the voice of authority, He commands unclean spirits and devils to obey him. The psalmist urges the faithful to “hear God’s voice” and “harden not your hearts”. The following of Christ is no easy road, but rather the commitment to open oneself fully to the healing power of God in our midst. The constant turning of life’s joys and sorrows to God will permit the Christian to live free in the knowledge and love of God. Bowing down in worship before God in the Liturgy, the Church is transformed in bits and pieces into the image of Christ, and becomes the presence of Christ in the world. Some will say Liturgy is a waste of time and “God doesn’t need it!” Indeed, one of the prefaces lifts our hearts to God with the words, “you have no need of our praise, yet the desire to praise you, is itself your gift.” Praise God with every fiber of your being.

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First Reading Deuteronomy 18:15-20

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy

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.

Commentary Deuteronomy 18:15-20 b John Paul Heil: Main Theme: God promises to send his people a prophet like Moses. The people of Israel's experience of God speaking to them directly on Mt. Horeb after the exodus event was so terrifying for them, that they begged God, "Let us not again hear the voice of the Lord, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die." God agreed that this was a good idea and through his great prophet Moses informed the people of his promise to raise up for them a prophet like Moses from among them to relay God's word to them in the future. Like Moses (and all true prophets) this prophet will be the very mouth-piece of God; he will speak not on his own authority but with the authority of God himself so that the people must listen to him as they would to God himself--"I 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."

Jesus fulfills this promise of a prophet like Moses who speaks with the very authority of God himself, as illustrated in today's Gospel reading--"he taught them as one having authority . . . a new teaching with authority." In listening to the authoritative teaching of Jesus, the prophet like Moses, we are listening to the word of God himself.

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Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9

✠(8) 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.

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.

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."

Commentary Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: LISTEN to what God may be saying to us TODAY. This exuberant hymn is appropriately sung by pilgrims streaming into the Jerusalem temple, the place of God's special presence, to worship the God of creation and salvation with joy and thanksgiving. The invitation to acclaim God as the "rock" of our salvation acknowledges God as the ultimate origin and ever-present place of our protection, safety, and security. It also recalls the "rock" that God commanded Moses to strike with his staff so that

water will flow from it for God's chosen people of Israel, wandering and grumbling in the arid wilderness, to drink for their life and salvation (see today's First Reading).

The psalm passionately urges us to hear the voice of God speaking to us today. We are not to "harden" our hearts and thus close our ears to the ways God may be speaking to us, as did our Israelite ancestors in the desert. At Meribah ("contention" or "strife") in the day of Massah ("testing") they rebelliously quarreled against and "tested" God, questioning his saving presence with them, even though God had miraculously provided them with life-giving water (First Reading). Are we failing to see the ways that God's saving presence is with us today? How may God be speaking to us today in these scriptures, in the events of our times, in our personal lives?

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Second Reading 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

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.

Commentary 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 by Virginia Smith: This weekend's reading picks up precisely where last weekend's left off, so it would be reasonable to suppose that themes dealt with then continue to be the focus as, indeed, they do. Paul remains convinced that Jesus' second coming is imminent; therefore, he advises the Corinthians to remain in whatever social status they find themselves so as not to make unnecessary waves. If he acknowledges that the unmarried are more free to serve the Lord without divided loyalties, he in no way frowns upon marriage.

Paul has been accused, often unfairly, of being a male chauvinist, so it should be recognized that in today's passage, he places the same demands on men and women in respect to their duties to God. Far from being biased against women, this position is unusually unconventional,

even innovative.

Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians deals in large part with answers to questions the community has posed. Written c. 56, a mere quarter century after Jesus' ascension, this first letter was bound to deal with the parousia. The eyewitness generation was dying off, and still Jesus had not returned as he promised. What were they to make of that? Such questions demonstrated how seriously these recent converts took their faith. Do we think about faith issues deeply enough to raise questions of our own, and if not, why not? Answers are good to be sure, but sometimes questions are better. They get us to thinking about the things that really matter.

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Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 4:16

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

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

Gospel Mark 1:21-28

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

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.

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Commentary Mark 1:21-28 by Deacon Owen Cummings: In the first part of St. Mark's Gospel there is an emphasis on the wonder-working activity of the Lord. In the subsequent passages and chapters Jesus goes on to heal Peter's mother-in-law and many people (1:29-34), to cleanse a leper (1:40-45), to heal a paralytic (2:1-12), to heal the man with the withered hand (3:1-6), and so forth. One could easily form the impression of a wonder-worker, a magician, as it were. St. Mark therefore is careful to paint the Lord Jesus as powerful not only in deed, but also in word. Thus, the first section of our gospel reading has Jesus teaching in the synagogue. Further into the narrative, people are amazed at his teaching with authority. The unclean spirit asks a rhetorical question, "Have you come to destroy us?" The answer is "Yes." Jesus' very being is the destruction of the powerful hold of evil on humankind. Jesus is the one who liberates from its stranglehold. The word for "authority" in verse 22 in Greek is *exousia*. Taken very literally, it means "out of" (*ex*) "his being" (*ousia*). Authority is not a pose for Jesus. He speaks from the depths of his being. The same word is repeated in verse 27 for emphasis. He acts from the depth of his being. Word and action are commensurate in Jesus. He is the Word of God speaking, and he is the Act of God healing.

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