

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [B]

I.

I find it rather strange. In today's Gospel we hear Jesus immediately made his way to the synagogue on the Sabbath and *taught*. But nary a word is recorded as to *what* Jesus taught.

Mark's account draws our attention not to the content of Jesus' teaching but to the people's reaction to it. Those who heard Jesus teach were utterly amazed, overwhelmed, deeply inspired.

We've all heard charismatic and persuasive speakers. People were not clamoring about Jesus' charisma and persuasiveness though he certainly had these qualities.

When a rabbi would teach he would do so on the basis of another rabbi – his credentials. In the Jewish rabbinic tradition, rabbis traced their teaching authority to those who instructed them and all the way back to Moses, which is back to God.

To some degree this is true in the Christian tradition as our teachers – bishops, priests and theologians – make appeals to the greatest teachers – e.g. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Teresa of Avilia, St. Therese of Lisieux, and the like.

The manner of Jesus' teaching so struck the people – indeed, it astonished them! Unlike the rabbis, Jesus did not appeal to rabbinic teachers (back to Moses), but *taught on his own authority* (which to the Jewish hearers of his time understood Jesus to be boldly declaring that he is no less than God!).^f

Think of the authoritative voice of Jesus carried by the Church through the ages. Jesus' voice stands to be as astonishing today as it was in the Capernaum synagogue 2000 years ago.

II.

In our age, many voices compete for our attention. There are many voices seeking to exert authority over us.

Beware especially two villainous voices that poise the greatest threat to you and me – threatening our peace now and also where we will dwell for all eternity.

Relativism and *secularism* arrogantly assert that there is no place in our society for God, for God's way, God's truth and God's life. Relativists and secularists voices crow, "well, if you must practice some religion do it privately."

Friends, beware: the tide of godlessness is rising quickly all around us.

A First Example

Did you know just last week a crowd of protesters that numbered somewhere between 300,000 – 600,000 (a large portion of whom are in college and high school) converged in Washington DC. They made their way to our nation's capital, not to occupy but to fortify – to give bold witness to supreme importance of right of human life our Founding Fathers placed the fabric of our country. f

A half million strong, they assembled peaceably, marched orderly, no reports of civil disobedience, no interests in prolonged occupation in another's property, no refusing to leave, no moral degeneration marked by deviant or even criminal behaviors.

The 6-lane Constitution Avenue was closed and there procession spread out nearly two miles long.

Some 40 teens and young adults traveled from our three local parishes. Perhaps I missed it, but I did not read a word about it in the local press nor did I hear any reports on local radio stations. Aside from the halls of our Catholic school and among the awesome teens and adults who are SLT, nary a word did I hear.

I wonder if such silence would mark an event transporting – say - 40 local teachers who joined together – say – with 300,000 of their colleagues to shut down Constitution Avenue while march their way to Capital Hill.

A Second Example

There are strong voices right here asserting that religion is a private matter and nothing more. Relativistic and secular voices have driven the name of God and open discussions about God and prayer itself from the vast majority of local government led school districts in our area.

It sure seems strange and strikes me also as sad that some deem God such a threat to our republic that He is no longer welcome in our local government schools – driven out, banned.

A Third Example

Many of the first settlers made the dangerous trip to the New World not pursuing any “American Dream” but driven mostly by dreams of religious liberty.

Persecuted in Europe – the practice of Catholicism was illegal in England until 1832, the poor Irish were assaulted and starved by the British Crown for their Catholic religion, and the French revolutionaries violently sacked Catholic churches and monasteries making many Christian martyrs in the process –

people fled their homes with the hope of establishing a new home where religious liberties would be respected.

A week ago Friday, the US Department of Health and Human Services declared that religious institutions who serve the common good – including Catholic schools, charities and hospitals – will no longer be exempt in the sweeping new health-care mandate that requires employers to purchase contraception, abortion-inducing drugs and sterilization coverage for their employees.

The federal government shockingly announced that the Catholic Church and her institutions will be forced to pay directly for actions that violate our Catholic teaching beginning one year from now.

An aside:

- the Amish do not carry health insurance and the government respects *their* principles
- Christian Scientists want to heal by prayer alone and the new health-care reform law respects *their* principles.
- Quakers and some others object to killing even in wartime and the government respects *their* principle for conscience objection.

Let's all be honest for we know this to be true: the shrill, godless voices of relativism and secularism do not evoke astonishment, amazement and deep inspiration.

Listen, instead, to the One voice that truly speaks with *authority (exousia)*.

Listen to the voice of Jesus in whom alone can we and will be find true and lasting peace.