

Homily For Tuesday of the 1st Week of Ordinary Time- Year II

St Peter's 8:30am/7:30pm Masses - Jan 14, 2020

1 Sam 1:9-20 "She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord."

1 Sam 2 "My heart exults in the Lord. My strength is exalted in my God."

Mark 1:21-28 "The unclean spirit convulsed him and cried with a loud voice."

With What Authority?

Intro

I have this vivid memory of when I was a child in my Catholic faith, of how common it was for people to stay around praying after mass. They would kneel in their pews or before the tabernacle, in front of the statues of the saints, asking for their intercession and lighting candles. The intensity of the prayer among those offering up their sorrows was very high. It still is amongst those who still do this.

A woman who was coming into the Catholic faith once told me that if you did this in her Protestant church, it would make others very uncomfortable. People would be coming up to you to ask what's wrong and could they help you. You would not be allowed simply to sit or kneel and pray. That should be done at home out of sight.

As Catholics, we have the Real Presence of Jesus, of course, to make our prayerful devotion make sense. We are not just making a public spectacle of ourselves. We are resting in the Real Presence of the God we worship and asking him to come into the situations of our lives and the lives of those we love.

Hanna and Eli

Hanna is one of THE great women of the Bible. We should never undervalue her contribution to God's great plan of salvation. And, that contribution begins with her pouring out her soul before the Lord. What a beautiful image. Of course Eli, the temple priest at the time, entirely misses her devotion and her self offering to

God, thinking only about how she looks like she is disrespecting the temple environment with drunkenness.

But Hannah is holding nothing back in her prayer. And, later, when her prayer is answered, she does not even keep the child for herself. She gives it back to God. These things are everything we are called to do and to be: Devote ourselves in relationship to God, and offer him back our blessings, in recognition that they are not ours to begin with. Once she had received the priest's blessing, she was able to leave it all in God's hands and not worry any more.

Very importantly today we have, in the Psalm Canticle, the rest of Hannah's prayer, which she prays when she is leaving her son, Samuel, with Eli to be raised in the temple. We should recognize this prayer:

"My heart exults in the Lord. My strength is exalted in my God. The Lord brings low. He also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust. He lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour." Do you remember Mary's own prayer of exultation immediately after she has received the gift from God in her own womb: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour." That's the Canticle of Mary, isn't it?

Hannah directly foreshadows the great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy. She points forward to the ultimate event. This is no accident. This is the movement of the soul who cooperates fully with God's plan to save His people.

Jesus and the Demon

The fruit of Hannah's womb, Samuel the prophet, anointed David as king of Israel. The fruit of Mary's womb is the king of kings. The authority of that king is on display in today's Gospel reading. It says that the people were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.

What delicious comparisons we can make in today's readings. They should make us smile with how beautifully interwoven is our story.

Hanna was praying to God in her heart and with her lips. The demon confronting Jesus uses words that look like a prayer: "I know who you are, the Holy One of

Israel." Hanna bows low before God's presence. The demon recognizes Jesus but refuses to bow down before him, fearing that he will be destroyed by Jesus authority.

The priest, Eli, who should have known better, rebuked Hanna for praying quietly. Jesus rebuked the demon justly for being noisy, telling him to be quiet. Eli, realizing that Hanna's prayer was legitimate, let her stay in the temple. Jesus, who is the new temple of God, made the demon leave. Hanna went home calmed by her interaction with God. The demon left with convulsions and screams. Out of Hanna came the great prophet Samuel. Out of the possessed man came forth the demon which had sought the death of the man's soul.

The people

The people were amazed at the authority Jesus had to cast out the unclean spirit. But this is not just Jesus versus the unclean spirit. It is the power of God versus the powers of evil. The evil spirits know Jesus because he had overcome them in his wilderness temptation. The demons know who is Jesus in the tabernacle and on the altar. He is the Holy One of God.

Like the possessed man, we are in the middle of a battle for possession of our souls. But we are not alone. We have Hanna, whose prayer and willingness to suffer ridicule, even by good people, points forward to our Blessed Mother, who suffered so much to bring forth our Saviour. And, we have Jesus, whose authority calls out of us what would enslave us and make us miserable. We have Jesus, the true temple, where we may worship without fear or shame.