

Homily For Tuesday of the 22nd Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - September 3, 2019

Memorial of St. Gregory the Great

1 Thess. 5:1-6,9-11 "God has destined us for obtaining salvation through Jesus Christ, who died for us."

Psalm 27 "I will seek to behold the beauty of the Lord."

Luke 4:31-37 "They were amazed at the authority of his teaching and command of the unclean spirits."

Who's the Boss

Introduction

I called the house of some friends. Their five year old answered. It was apparent that his mom and dad were not home. Assuming one of his teenage siblings was babysitting, I asked: So, who's in charge? His simple answer was: "I am!" I suppose that, when you are five, you like to feel like you have authority sometimes.

Authority is key to everything for us. Who and what do we consider authoritative? What wisdom do we consider worth paying attention to and allowing to influence our lives? Probably the first significant rebellion against authority for children does not wait until they are teens. It's the first time they respond to a request with: "You're not the boss of me." As children start a new school year, they will be faced with authority almost every moment of their day, and some won't like it.

We learn that everywhere in our worldly experience, there are people and laws to which we must submit if there is to be order in society. As people of faith, however, we must recognize that there is another order of authority. That's why the prayer in today's Collect is so beautiful: "O God, who rules your people in love, through the intercession of Pope Saint Gregory, give a spirit of wisdom to those to whom you have given authority to govern, that the flourishing of a holy flock may become the eternal joy of the shepherds."

St. Gregory the Great was a 6th century successor to Peter, who received his authority to govern the Church from Jesus himself. Today, we are asking God to instill in our Church leaders a truly divine leadership, the same leadership Gregory

exercised, which is why today we call him great, not because of any power of his own.

Luke

Luke tells us that Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town we can see still today. It was the place of the headquarters of Jesus' ministry throughout the region of Galilee in the north. As one scholar put it, this was the place from which Jesus engaged the battle to reclaim the world, from evil forces, for the heavenly kingdom.

In today's gospel passage, the people there were first astounded by the way Jesus spoke with authority. Something about the way he taught and spoke resonated as being profoundly authoritative and that this was possibly a teacher that could be trusted. They were in the middle of a life and a world that was dominated, on the one hand, by the military authority of Rome and, on the other hand, by many teachers claiming to having an authoritative message.

A teacher's ability to perform exorcisms was one of the tests of whether he was the real thing or not. Jesus used exorcism to demonstrate authority over Satan's kingdom. After being astounded by his words, it says that they were amazed by this further demonstration of his authority. Apparently, many exorcists recited long incantations and used foul smelling plants to expel demons. But Jesus simply speaks a word and out demonic spirit goes. Who is in charge? Jesus is.

What I find astounding is the reaction of the demonic spirit. It is terrified of Jesus. Have you come to destroy us? This should be fascinating for us. The unclean spirit says: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." So, the demons know Jesus and they know his authority over them, but they refuse to submit willingly. Again, there is something that is incredibly familiar to us. Many in the world know who God is but refuse to accept him and his authority, even though it is based on love and for our own good.

1 Thess. 5

St. Paul is describing for the Thessalonian Church, the Day of the Lord. That is the appointed time when Christ the Lord will come again as Saviour. A very interesting connection between these two readings is that Jesus' miraculous exorcism of the demon takes place literally on the literal Day of the Lord, the Sabbath. Now that's real authority.

Paul does not know when the day will come, but the most important thing is to be spiritually ready. One of the signs is that people will say, we have peace and security. Paul mocks the Roman motto of "peace and security", which gives an inflated sense of self importance. The children of light won't be caught off guard unless - and this is the message for us - unless we betray our Christian identity by falling back into the godlessness of pagan culture. It was true then and it is true today. The purpose of Christ's death is not just for forgiveness of sins but to reorient and restructure our entire existence by submitting to the authority of Christ.

St. Gregory the Great

There are many wise sayings attributed to St. Gregory. One that caught my eye for today was about making sure that the authority you have is exercised with love and not severity. He says: "The proof of love is in the works. Where love exists, it works great things. But when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist."

Psalm

Today the psalmist suggests that if we make The Lord our light and our salvation, there is nothing we will need to fear. He will be our stronghold, our safety and all that is beautiful. We will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, both here and on the Day of the Lord.