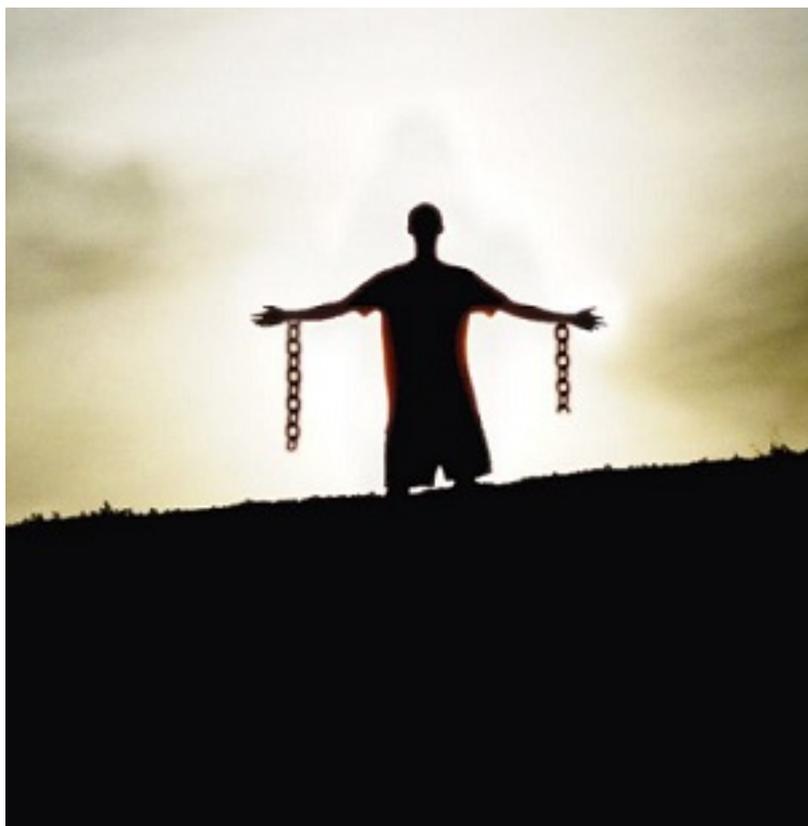


## Commentary to the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)



In today's Gospel reading the Sacred Writer, the Holy Spirit, speaks about the authority of the Lord. The reading is taken from the first chapter of the earliest of the Gospels, the Gospel of Mark. Jesus begins to teach in Capernaum. The people are held spellbound because he spoke with authority, not like the scribes. A man comes before Jesus who is in the hand of the power of evil. Jesus makes the devil come out of the man. The bystanders are amazed because Jesus has such authority.

What do we mean when we speak about the authority of the Lord? What do we mean when we talk about authority in general? What ways do we exercise authority? What ways do we exercise the authority of the Lord?

The word authority comes from the Latin word *auctoritas*. The basic meaning of this Latin word is creator. The word author also comes from this word. A writer can look at his or her work, an essay, a short story, a novel, a poem, a non-fiction study, whatever, an author can look at this work and say, "This is my creation? The government recognizes that the author has rights over his or her creation.

When we talk about the authority of the Lord, we recognize that He is the Creator, or Author of the Universe. He has the power to govern the universe. Just as an author can determine what takes place in the short story he or she writes, God can determine what takes place in the universe He has created.

When we talk about authority in general, we speak about the power a person has received to determine the actions of another person or a group of people. Society creates laws to protect its citizen and then gives authority to the police to enforce these laws. For example we give the police the authority to stop our cars if we are driving at 54 mph on a street where the speed limit is posted as 40 mph. However, as the source of authority, we can change the laws. If we change the speed limit on the same road to 55 mph, the policeman no longer has the right to stop us if we are going 54 mph. In general, authority is intimately connected with its source.

All authority is by nature transitional. There is a huge exception, though. The exception is the authority which comes from the Lord. In the Gospel of Mark, the people who listened to Jesus were amazed because they had never experienced someone speaking with such authority. Jesus held people spellbound because God gave Him the authority to teach the truth. This authority would never be removed from Jesus because Jesus was intimately united to his Father, the source of the authority.

We share in the authority of the Lord to the extent that we are united to the source of this authority. When we are confirmed we receive the power, the authority, to defeat evil in the world and to lead others to Jesus, the source of all truth. This authority is given to us by God. God can remove this authority and will remove this authority if we refuse to stay intimately united to him. God has entrusted us with his authority only to the extent that we allow him into our lives. That is the reason why the Church is adamant that we attend Church regularly and receive the sacraments regularly. We need to have union with God so we can bring his authority, his power to the world.

The crowd was spellbound because Jesus spoke with authority, not like the scribes and pharisees. People are no different now than they were then. People want to hear the real Word of God, and feel the presence of God in the words of the speaker. We can do this. We have the authority to do this. People can witness the Word of God present in our lives, and then choose to make the Word of God present in their own lives. We can do this. We can make Jesus' presence real for others. We have the authority to do this. People want to learn how to live their lives in such a way that when they conclude their lives they can stand before the Lord saying that they have made His Presence known in the world. We can do this. We have the authority, the power, to form others into Christian leaders. We have the authority, the power of Jesus Christ if only we stay united to him.

Today we pray that we may remain united to the Lord, the source of the power and the authority we have received.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ