

[Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Ps. 95; 1 Cor 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28]

How many of you remember the children's game, "Follow the Leader?" A group of children select who will be their leader. The leader determines what path the children will take along the street or sidewalk or driveway. Whatever the leader does, the children have to follow. Raise their arms and shake their hands, march instead of walk, say something silly instead of just being quiet.

Moses is the leader in much of the Old Testament. Only it isn't up to Moses to decide what the people of Israel are to do, or where their journey is to take them: God tells Moses and then Moses tells the people.

In today's First Reading, Moses is coming to the end of his faith journey. He has successfully and faithfully led them through the desert to the Promised Land. Now, according to God's will, another prophet is to lead them home.

How will that prophet be selected? God alone is the One Who selects and creates a prophet. Moses' successor is promised to come from his own family, calling his own people to repentance. This prophecy is fulfilled: God provides generations of new prophets to succeed the old.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul is not denigrating married life but is endorsing stability. Nor is he implying that married people cannot be devoted to the Lord. On Friday, we buried from our parish Gerry and Joan Kozak, faithful parishioners who celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in August, were here last for Mass on December 13th, and succumbed to the Corona virus this month on the 9th and the 15th. At their Funeral Mass, two sons and a grandson gave the most spiritual and scriptural eulogies I ever heard – quoting Scripture, giving witness to their own faith and speaking from a Christian heart. Both Gerry and Joan loved the Lord and gave a lifetime of witness to Him through their vocation of marriage. It shows through their children and grandchildren.

St. Paul speaks in today's Second Reading of the equality of husband and wife, of a mutuality that remains positive and valid, and of the call for both to make the proper priorities. What are the anxieties of your worldly life that keep you from growing in faith and in your faith practice?

We also have to remember that St. Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians thinking that the return of Jesus Christ in glory is imminent – it will be happening soon. If YOU were told that the Lord is coming back for us soon, how would YOU react? What would YOU do differently?

“Immediately” is a word which St. Mark uses a lot in his Gospel. The original Greek text in our Gospel for today says that Jesus enters the synagogue on the Sabbath IMMEDIATELY and begins teaching and healing. Note that unclean spirits recognize Jesus before the clean and the righteous people do!

Pentecost would be a long time coming after the death of prophecy. The Bible gives us almost no record of the time from the fifth to second centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ, some 300 years. Leadership became a pick-up game. And few were listening intently for a word from the Lord.

That’s at least one reason why the people of Capernaum were staggered by the experience they had of Jesus. He commanded unclean spirits successfully. He taught in a way that was not simply scholarly, but rang in their hearts like a tuning fork. The only word they could think of to describe what Jesus did was “authority.” He seemed, frankly, to know God and to speak with divine backing. Israel had not heard a word like that for a long, long time. It was like standing back at the base of Mount Horeb, and this time, not covering their ears.

He wasn’t just Jesus of Nazareth, he was also Jesus, Son of God. His origins were not just a sleepy town in Judea. His origins were in God’s own self. And as the Son of God, Jesus came to liberate us from the unclean spirits that plague us all -- even the unclean spirit that wants to put others down.

What demons are within our hearts, our lives that need to be expelled? Do we believe that Jesus Christ can expel them? Even the best of us harbor within ourselves an unclean spirit or two. “Unclean” simply means not compatible with the holiness of God. This isn’t a condition any of us can afford to be in! Like Jesus Christ, we, His followers, would do well to say what we believe and believe what we say; to do what we believe and believe in what we do. With courage, let us “follow our Leader” – Jesus Christ! AMEN!