

The word “Gospel” means “good news!” and most of us have been reading it or hearing it for many years and so we shouldn’t be surprised when we hear these words. But the people in the synagogue in today’s story were astounded at Jesus’ teaching, even though he was reading the same scriptures, because he taught with authority, not like the scribes. What he said was good news for the people but bad news for the unclean spirits!

We’ve all used the expression, “He speaks with authority” but what does it mean when we listen to today’s gospel?

We can try to understand what “authority” really means but most of us have a good feeling about what it is and could recognize authority when we hear it, even if we couldn’t completely explain it. We know who has authority almost instinctively or we grant people authority because of the situation we are in. Let me give you an example.

How many times have we tried to tell our youngest children something and they completely ignore us, On Saturday we say, “wear your hat! It’s cold” and they go out bare-headed. But on Tuesday morning they put their hat on and say, “Teacher says ... it’s important to wear a hat because we lose 90% of our body heat through our head!” You see, teacher speaks with authority, they KNOW, we’re just dumb parents!

I had another example the other day. My teenage granddaughter is quite the track athlete with a lot of success but inevitably she had a patch of not so good results and was ready to give it all up.

Lo and behold, they got a new coach at school and he gave her a real pep talk and said with some new coaching techniques she can be at the top again and now she’s all excited to get going.

Now her mother, and her grandad have been saying the same thing to her for weeks but would she listen to us? Naaaah! We’re supposed to say things like that, just because we love her, and so they don’t carry any weight. The new coach is an authority on the subject and so she listens to him.

I had an experience with a priest (who shall remain nameless) at a Parish I was at years ago. He was a very nice man and very smart but you could say he was a little dry, a little low energy. When he preached, it was very scholarly and full of quotes from saints but often when he was finished, I couldn’t really remember what he had said.

Then one Sunday he got up and something was different. He didn't lecture us, he told us a story of a tough-looking young man who knocked on the rectory door in need of help and how instead of turning him away, as he was tempted to do because of how he looked, he was touched by his troubles and got involved in the difficulties this person was going through and he told us how sad he felt and how he felt called to imitate Jesus by reaching out to him.

And we all listened and we all learned and we all knew that we are called to act the same way. Father wasn't just talking, he was talking with authority and it was exciting!

So we see that "The Authority" is the one we are sure knows all about something from experience, not just from studying.

In today's gospel, the scribes knew the scriptures, they could read where many people in those days could not, but when they read the scriptures and spoke of the power of God to cast out demons, they were just reading. When Jesus spoke of the power of God in his teaching, he actually backed it up and cast out the demons that were right there.

So the people were surprised that all these words they had been listening to for years were real, and they felt a real connection to them in their heart and not just their head, and they recognized where the real authority lay.

But it's a little bit of "good news – bad news" when this happens because it's good news when we recognize in our heart that someone is speaking with authority, that we can trust what they say to be true and real, but the bad news can be that we can't ignore what they say any longer and that means we have to act on what they are teaching and our nice comfortable existence is probably going to change and many of us do not like to have to change.

Jesus is at the beginning of his ministry in today's gospel and his fame is just beginning to spread, and over the next few weeks the gospel of Mark will tell us about many signs and wonders that Jesus worked, curing the sick and the possessed, to establish his authority. But then it will also tell us about how those who thought they had authority got jealous and began to criticize him and even began to plot to destroy him because what he was teaching would change everything.

You see, they were using their authority to gain power for themselves, not to lead the people according to God's plan, and so they were betraying the very knowledge that made them authorities in the first place.

Isn't it true that when someone does something wrong, we feel much worse about it, we feel betrayed in our trust, when that someone is one whom we recognized as an authority, especially when it happens in our church or our government or our schools or the police or anyone who we expect to practice what they stand for.

But we all face the same temptations. When we have heard Jesus teach, we can't deny that we know the truth and what we should be doing, but it's so easy to stick to the old ways, look after number one, and ignore what our heart is telling us to do, even though it's only by doing that we will become authorities.

We each have the power to become an authority on living as Christians, just by following what our ultimate authority has taught us

His teachings are pretty simple, love God and love each other. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, or as Father's sign says out in front of the church "Tweet others as you would like to be tweeted"

It takes courage to choose to follow true authority. It takes strength and we can get that strength by inviting the Lord into our lives right here and now in Holy Communion. To have God with us is to have that true authority in us as well, the authority that gives us courage and confidence to face any choice because when we make the right choice, Jesus will authorize it for us!

This is the good news indeed, we don't have to try to do it alone, and when we work with Jesus then there is no bad news!