

ecumenism; conversion; paschal mystery, salvation history; human dignity

Closing Prayer

Faithful God,
your Holy One, Jesus of Nazareth,
spoke the truth with authority,
and you confirmed his teaching by wondrous deeds.

Through his healing presence,
drive far from us all that is unholy,
so that by word and deed
we may proclaim him Messiah and Lord
and bear witness to your power to heal and save.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 4, Year B*³

CPL • LBC Year B Epiphany 4.odt • 2022-11-01

³ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

*Sunday between 28 January and 1 February inclusive ·
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Principal Service readings

Deuteronomy 18.15-20	The raising up of a prophet
Psalms 111	The great deeds of the Lord
Revelation 12.1-5a	The vision of the woman and the dragon
Mark 1.21-28	Jesus teaches at Capernaum and cures a demoniac

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus teaches at Capernaum and cures a demoniac

²¹They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' ²⁶And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching? with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Mark 1.21-28 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

After narrating the call of disciples Mark continues his focus on Jesus as the Spirit-endowed stronger one by presenting the day that inaugurates

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Jesus' ministry. This day, a Sabbath, involves Jesus showing his power as a teacher through a confrontation with an unclean spirit (1.21-28), as well as by healing Peter's mother-in-law (1.29-31), and by statements on healing and exorcism (1.32-34). The day perhaps foreshadows another Sabbath (16.1), between the day of his condemnation and his death (which is clearly defined by time indications: 15.1, 25, 33, 34) and the day of his resurrection.

Capernaum (from the Hebrew for 'village of Nahum') is on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, about two and a half miles from the source of the river Jordan. The historian Josephus says it was a fertile and prosperous area known also for its fishing industry (*War* 3.516-521). In the gospels it is the centre of Jesus' Galilean ministry, and in Mark 2.1 it is the site of the 'home' of Jesus.

The narrative begins with a summary description of his teaching, though without any content (1.21). Jesus is described as one who teaches with authority, which is unexpected (1.22). The narrative then moves onto a specific example, an exorcism story (1.23-26), but then concludes with a statement about people caught up by the authority of Jesus as an authoritative teacher (1.27-28).

The exorcism story is one of four in Mark – the other three are: the Gerasene demoniac (5.1-20); the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter with an unclean spirit (7.24-30); and the boy with the unclean spirit (9.14-29).

The narrative of this first story shows a pattern that I repeated in the others: (1) meeting of exorcist and demon (1.23); (2) the attempt of the demon to resist divine power (1.24); (3) the powerful response of the exorcist (1.25), usually commanding silence; (4) a command to leave (1.25); (5) the departure of the demon (1.26); and (6) various reactions of amazement or wonder, often with the story being shared far and wide (1.27).

Exorcism was not uncommon in the ancient world, which viewed the world as being populated by a wide variety of spirits, most of them threatening. Popular religion of the time (such as mystery cults and healing shrines) was very much concerned with liberating people from these malevolent powers. Similarly apocalyptic Judaism thought of the

world as being locked in a power struggle between God and the power(s) of evil. The historian Josephus lists Solomon's ability to expel demons as one of his many accomplishments (*Antiquities* 8:45), and the *Testament of Solomon* (first or second century A.D) is full of stories of Solomon's victories over demons.

Only Mark makes the confrontation of Jesus with evil spirits the first public act of Jesus in his ministry.² Jesus' identity is shouted out by a spirit (1.24), showing that invisible forces recognize him for who he is. However human Jesus appears in the narrative he is still a figure of mystery and power.

Quotations

1

Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. Grace is power, not just pardon.

John Piper, 1946–

2

Very often what God first helps us towards is not the virtue itself but just this power of always trying again.

C. S. Lewis, 1898–1963

3

Many Christians estimate difficulty in the light of their own resources, and thus they attempt very little and they always fail. All giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His power and presence to be with them.

James Hudson Taylor, 1832–1905

Related topics

For further study:

Jesus Christ, teacher; Jesus Christ, Son of God; Jesus Christ, healer and deliverer; sacraments of healing and reconciliation; evangelization;

² Luke locates it after Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (4.31-37), and Matthew omits it entirely.