

[71] Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings: *1 Deuteronomy 18:15-20 / Psalm 95 / 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 / Mark 1:21-28*

Moses tells his people that prophets like him will be taken from their number and will lead them. If we are to properly understand what he is saying, then we must look to the prior verses not included here against false worship and divination. We read: "Let there not be found among you anyone who causes their son or daughter to pass through the fire, or practices divination, or is a soothsayer, augur, or sorcerer, or who casts spells, consults ghosts and spirits, or seeks oracles from the dead" (verses 10-11). Moses is emphasizing several important points:

- (1) They must not corrupt their faith with the worship of other or false gods.
- (2) They do not have to look outside of themselves as the chosen people for prophets (God speaks to them through their own).
- (3) They trust the providence of God and do not seek forbidden knowledge.

Echoing the commandments, any violation of these points is condemned as an abomination before the Lord. Fearful of any direct confrontation with almighty God, the people will be guided by the Lord through his intermediaries.

This pattern is still pursued today in the Christian community. The new People of God or the Church is called by God and given shepherds who govern and speak in Christ's name, empowered to extend the ministry or work of Jesus. The Mass is our great worship where the sacrifice of Calvary is re-presented in an unbloody manner at our altars. The bishops in union with the Pope constitute the authentic teaching authority of the Church. We are anointed at baptism into a nation of prophets. It is that commission that makes us missionary disciples. Outside the Catholic community, there is no guarantee to any message proclaimed and no assured efficacy to divine mysteries or sacraments. Catholic Christians, like their Hebrew counterparts of long ago, are warned to steer clear of false worship and the occult.

True religion signifies the end of magic. Judaism (a natural religion) and Catholic Christianity (a supernatural religion) are both instigated by the same one true God. We are forbidden to engage in voodoo, oriental mysticism, new age religion, naturalist religion, and conventional witchcraft or Satanism. Divination of the future is interpreted as a distrust of God's will for us. Black magic or spells is condemned because one invokes the demonic spirits. Similarly necromancy is condemned; an important admonishment when there is a new fascination with ghost hunting. Christians are warned that to avoid Quiji boards, tarot cards, palm readers, and séances. All of it violates the first commandment of the Decalogue.

The Canaanites worshipped Molech, a false deity judged by the fathers of the Church as a bloodthirsty demon. Indeed, sometimes his name is still mentioned in Christian circles in

regard to the sins of abortion and infanticide. Molech demanded child sacrifice. Heated with fire, the idol was a bronze statue into which the victims were thrown. The pagans believed that favors and special protection could be merited by such sacrifices. Might the abortion of millions of children constitute the return of the demon Molech's reign? Just another name for Satan, it may be that the devil hides his thirst for human blood behind the semantics employed to disguise the true nature of abortion. Consciences are numbed to the terrible truth that we are murdering our children. There is no pro-Choice or pro-abortion Christianity. Such opposition to the Gospel of Life is not only immoral but renounces the Christ and the God of Abraham. It assumes the mantle of idolatry. The responsorial psalm also speaks of the need to replace rebellion with fidelity and idolatry with right worship. Our minds must be opened and our hearts softened to the truth. We are admonished, "Harden not your hearts as at Mariah...." God's people of old turned away as faithless, fearful and selfish. People today are also tempted away from true faith. They are afraid to take responsibility for their actions, even parenthood. They give preeminence to their own wants, even over the needs of others, as with the dignity of persons and the sanctity of life.

The second reading mentions some of the fears or anxieties that can afflict us. While they should be an occasion for heightened fidelity, the opposite is what often occurs. People forget the goodness that God has shown them. Others get angry or doubt when God does not answer their prayers as they would like. They wrongly postulate prayer as a demand instead of as a humble request. It is just such a situation that led people of old astray. St. Paul urges that believers should be "free of anxieties," as the concerns of the world might distract us from the Lord and from his service.

The Gospel chronicles our Lord's visit to the synagogue in Capernaum. He encounters someone possessed by a demon. Jesus immediately rebukes him, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The "unclean spirit" makes a loud cry and leaves. The onlookers are amazed both at his power and that he speaks with authority. As prophets, we can invoke this same authority and power in casting out the demon that secretly devours the lives of our children in abortion. As prophets, we can proclaim that Jesus is Lord and invite others into the Catholic community of faith. We are summoned to speak the truth about justice and charity to an oppressive and selfish world.

- Do we place confidence in the Lord who calls us to take up our crosses and to follow him?
- Are we prophets— faithful, courageous and strong in proclaiming the truth?
- Have we been the voice for the voiceless, especially the marginalized and the unborn?
- Do we avoid the occult and any "false gods" that would compromise our witness?
- How have we sought to bring the light of Christ against the darkness or demonic in the world?