

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 31, 2021 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Moses spoke to all the people, saying: "A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen. This is exactly what you requested of the LORD, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let us not again hear the voice of the LORD, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die.' And the LORD said to me, 'This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.' Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it. But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die."

Psalm: Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Brothers and sisters: I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided. An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit. A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. I am telling you this for your own

benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction.

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; 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!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The readings this Sunday evoke for me David Haas' beautiful setting of the psalm for this Sunday. It is entitled, "*If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts*" (Haas). As a composer, I understand technical devices that make his setting work so well, but I don't really spend time on details like that. I am taken away by the luxury of the music. Thanks, David. Then, in the readings, I am asked to hear the word of God *with my heart*, rather than getting distracted by anything else, even the music! Let me demonstrate. The First Reading quotes Moses' words to the people, words spoken to him by God himself: I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth. Moses has been an intermediary between God and the people, and he now promises another mediator to replace him. This could have been terrifying to them. To illustrate, look what their reaction had been to the ten commandments. brought to them by Moses.

We are told that the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai in great fire and thunder and a blare of brackish trumpets! The people were filled with fear and trembling. They stood far off and yelled, "Don't make us listen to that voice again, or see that great fire again, because we might die from it." It is quite understandable. They could not hear the word of God because fear controlled their hearts. Who can blame them? Do you or I ever find God too large and threatening for our small selves? Do we ever ignore God's voice as it speaks commandments that go against what we want? Against what? Well, maybe we take the name of the Lord our God in vain. Or miss Mass on Sunday. Or dishonor our parents or desire to commit adultery. Maybe we steal or lie, or lust after wives and husbands not our own. Television and innumerable movies advertise the irresistible joys of such sins. By now we are inured to what our culture today lures us to! But God's voice lures us also.

In the synagogue Jesus drives out a devil that was itself violently afraid, no joke about it. "The unclean spirit convulsed [the man,] and with a loud cry came out of him." Jesus then "rebuked" it. Jesus teaches "as one having authority." He uses commands only when he sees our violation of God's relation to his people. Like his *abba*, he uses "authority" to warn us back from the destruction that, true to its name, will destroy our lives. This means that rebukes from God are for our good! Could that make us afraid of him? Yes. But God and Jesus become hardhearted only for our good, not because they are destroyers. Today's Gospel tells of their power over what is evil in our world. That is why our Psalm for Sunday shows us singing joyfully to the Lord. Because that Lord has been fighting for a place in our world, in our hearts and in our souls. Therefore, *if today you hear God's voice and listen to it, harden not your heart.*

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Does God raise ordinary people from our midst to become prophets? Is there a cause for which you might become a prophet?
2. What are the anxieties you most feel? Do you have a way to deal with them? What virtue do you think might help most in your attempts to control anxieties? St. Paul recommends "adherence to the Lord without distraction."
3. Jesus "taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." Was there an incident that confirmed Jesus' teaching and showed people its authenticity? If you can't have absolute confirmation, as they did, what will work for you? Trust? Explain.

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen