

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Fourth Ordinary Sunday

### **First reading:**

(Deuteronomy 18.15-20)

*The Second Moses*

Moses was the messenger who gave the Law to Israel on Mount Sinai. In their difficult and lonely journey of 40 years through the desert, he was their leader.

It was his legal decisions on cases presented to him that formed Israel. His prayers gave them manna in the desert, water from the rock and protection from their enemies. Israel remembered him ever afterwards as the founder of their people.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the last of the five books of the Law, God had promised that he would raise up another leader, a Second Moses. At the time of Jesus, God's final messenger (who would put everything to rights) was thought of in these terms. This is why Matthew especially represents Jesus in these terms: just like Moses, he was persecuted at birth by the king, and later had to flee into exile until his persecutor was dead. He taught his Sermon on the Mount just as Moses gave the Law on the mountain. He gave bread in the desert just as Moses had done. So, when Jesus taught 'with authority' in the synagogue at Capernaum, he was seen as acting like Moses, the teacher.

### **Question:**

Is it helpful or harmful to have a Church that teaches with authority?

### **Second reading:**

(1 Corinthians 7.32-35)

*Marriage or Celibacy?*

Paul's reasons for celibacy can be read on two levels. The first, superficial, level is that both husband and wife may be divided in mind, may have loyalties divided between the Lord and their spouse. They have to be preoccupied with pleasing the other partner in the marriage. In itself, this is a very important part of the marriage, a vital part of being 'one flesh', one thinking, living person.

At this level, such concern is very much part of 'the Lord's affairs' and cannot stand in opposition to them. At another level, however, there may be tension, for each marriage partner is concerned to provide a firm material basis for family life, and so is bound for the sake of the family to get involved in worldly values, providing a good standard of living for the family.

The point of celibacy is that the celibate must stand as a witness that these material values are – for them - of less importance than the eternal values of the Lord's service. Important as the values of family life are, the celibate has the opportunity to turn wholly away from this scale of values. Celibacy does not make sense unless the values of the Kingdom of God fill the celibate's whole horizon.

### **Question:**

How valuable is celibacy as a witness in the Church?

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## **Gospel:**

*(Mark 1.21-28)*

### *Jesus teaches with Authority*

This story goes one step further in showing the growing authority of Jesus, which is the theme of the early part of Mark's gospel.

He has already called the disciples. He calls and they simply follow. It seems that he is a total stranger to them, yet with such authority that they drop everything to follow him.

Now, in the synagogue, he teaches on his own authority. He does not quote the interpretations of others, as rabbinic teachers did, saying, 'Rabbi X says this, Rabbi Y says that.' No, Jesus teaches, 'I say to you ... ' He seems to be master even of the law. But it is God's Law. Only God has authority over it, so who does he think he is?

At least he is the teacher comparable to Moses, who is to come into the world, the teacher prophesied in today's first reading. Then, to confirm his authoritative teaching, he shows his authority by overcoming the dreaded unclean spirit, wringing from it the snivelling protest, 'Have you come to destroy us?' and the acknowledgement that he has a special link with God.

## **Question:**

On the human level, why did people follow Jesus so enthusiastically?

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