

Homily.4OrdB.1.31.21
St. Bernard Church
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Our Gospel today from the 1st Chapter of Mark tells us three things about Jesus:

- What He says
- Who He is
- What He does

First, what He says. When Jesus speaks, He does so with authority and power.

If Jesus were here just like He was in the synagogue, we would be able to sense His authority and His power.

Since He is not here in this church in that same way, how are we supposed to react when we hear His words?

If we listen to His words with ears and hearts of faith, we will sense His power and authority.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.”

A few examples.

St. Hilary of Poitiers lived in the 4th Century. He wasn't raised as a Christian, but he wondered about the gift of creation and wanted to find out the meaning of life. So he went searching.

Eventually, he came upon the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. He was profoundly influenced by the Gospel of John, especially these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...”

As he continued to read John's Gospel, Hilary learned that Jesus was the Son of God sent to bring humanity to eternal life, and that His followers were to patiently endure the trials and challenges of life to gain bliss in heaven. Hilary internalized what he learned. He became a Christian, a bishop, a saint and a doctor of the church. And it all started from reading the Bible.

A few years ago, I met a young woman here in Tulsa who had been raised in Judaism. She had become Catholic. I asked her what led her to become a Christian and join the Catholic Church.

She told me that when she was in college in Arizona, she got curious one day about Jesus. She went to the library, found a Bible, sat down and read the entire Gospel of Matthew. She said that when she finished, she just knew that what she read was true, so she became a Christian and eventually a Catholic.

You've probably heard about Rachel's Vineyard, the ministry to men and women who have had a child aborted. Rachel's Vineyard brings powerful healing to these men and women.

And the way Rachel's Vineyard works is that the men and woman who attend are guided by passages in the Bible into having an encounter with Jesus. Jesus brings love and healing to these men and woman who were wounded by abortion just as He did to people in the Bible.

The Word of God is living and effective, sharper than a two-edged sword. It's alive. It's powerful.

Now with respect to who Jesus is, His words and who He is are one and the same.

He is the words He speaks. His teaching is Himself. There is nothing Jesus says that does not spring from His true identity. There is nothing He says that is the least bit inconsistent with who He claims to be.

This so true that even the unclean spirit knows from what Jesus has said to the synagogue crowd that He is the Son of God who has been sent to destroy evil.

Finally, with regard to what Jesus does, the actions of Jesus are also completely consistent with what He says and with Who He is. He commands the unclean spirit to come out of the possessed man.

In all of this, Jesus reveals to each of us our identity, mission and purpose.

Each of us is to know and speak the Word of God from Scripture.

Then, we internalize the Word of God, its truth, its beauty, its power. The Word of God shapes who we are, who we are becoming. We become what we believe. We become what we say.

And then we act like Jesus, doing what Jesus did. We unite our lives as fully as possible with His life. We become the Word made flesh. This means that we become a sacrifice, giving ourselves for Jesus and for others in the world.

This all comes together for us in the Mass.

We hear the word of God, we embrace it and commit to be people of the Word.

In the Eucharist, we consume Jesus and our lives become united with His. As St. Augustine said, we become what we consume.

By putting our lives on the altar in the form of the bread and the wine, we commit to be a sacrifice for others. We can live this out only through the grace that is given to us when we take Jesus into our own bodies and souls.

When we live all this out, just like the crowd in the synagogue when Jesus was there, we will be astonished and amazed. Our identity, who we are, and what we say and what we do, will be integrated by our faith in Jesus. We will be sanctified, and the fame of Jesus will spread everywhere throughout our region.