



Fourth Week in Ordinary Time: 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**He taught them with Authority.**

I often listen, though a bit distracted, to Thought for the Day on Radio 4: it comes on about 7:50am when I'm in the midst of breakfast. The other day Prof. Mona Siddiqui, a Muslim from Durham University, was speaking about Education and the current problems for students at university in the midst of the Pandemic. I took note of her words to this effect: "the greatest act of charity is handing on knowledge". She was of course talking about the privilege of higher education and the power that rests in the hands of those who are fortunate to learn at this level, and what responsibility then rests with them to act in love, to hand on what they have acquired.

Education has become centre stage in the present Pandemic: at all levels, and especially in schools, where children's homes have become more important than ever in creating a learning environment in association with the school. Many parents are finding their enhanced role in handing on knowledge a great challenge!

It is interesting then this Sunday to see the role of Jesus as a Teacher is centre stage too. In St Mark we read "His Teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, He taught them with authority". And, the teaching is further enhanced by the healing power that Jesus so often brings to bear in situations where He is teaching. In the time of Our Lord possession by unclean spirits would have been a way of explaining mental illness today. And, that has been another impact of the Pandemic, the openness people have about the lockdown and its effect on their mental wellbeing.

As a priest, privileged to have spent time in learning about Theology and the Scriptures, like the Scribes of Jesus day, my mind of course turns to self-examination on the occasion of reading this Gospel. How "authoritative" is my Teaching about the Way, the Way of Jesus. I am always shy about admitting that I am pleased to know someone has felt better for speaking to me, but I was so happy the other day when a phone call I made to a person in hospital meant a lot to them. In fact, I simply affirmed that person's contribution to the Church and the Faith: the words were true and they were healing.

You won't be surprised to know that I follow the words and deeds of Pope Francis a lot. In these times it is much easier to do so because of modern technology, tweets, social media and so on. His teaching on the importance of Scripture in the life of prayer was the focus of his reflection at the Wednesday Audience at St Peter's. I said on Sunday last, the Sunday of the Word of God, that we would hear more about this in the course of the year. Well, here was a beautiful unpacking of the role of Scripture in our spiritual lives. The Pope, Lydia O'Kane on Vatican News wrote "underlined that the Bible was written for everyone of us individually, to bring us "a Word of God". My mind went back to the day in school (I was probably around fourteen) where the teacher (a priest as it

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happens) asked us to read a section of Scripture to ourselves and then close our eyes to think and pray about it. These days we might call that “Lectio Divina” – a “Divine Reading”, and it has always remained with me, as we then shared it with each other. Perhaps that’s something we could try at home in families, after all RE should be part of home teaching too.

What I wanted to say though, is that the words of Pope Francis were “authoritative”, they came from someone real, like Jesus Himself. He comes in the long tradition of faithful, true teachers, like St Timothy, the helper of St Paul, who we remembered in Mass this past week, one who was never ashamed of witnessing to the Lord in His work of evangelization. May we all follow in his footsteps bringing to future generations, the greatest act of love, sharing our knowledge of Jesus the Way, the Truth, the Life.

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