

(B4) SUNDAY 4 OF THE YEAR

(JANUARY 31ST, 2021)

Readings: *Deuteronomy 18: 15 – 20; Ps. 94(95); 1 Corinthians 7:32 – 35; Mark 1: 21 – 28.*

Both the New Testament Reading and the Gospel for today follow on closely from those we heard last Sunday. Writing to the Corinthians Paul continues the theme of not being so taken up with the affairs of our earthly life that we fail to *give our undivided attention to the Lord*. In one of his books CS Lewis tells of an occasion during his prayers when, instead of following the words of a collect asking that we should *so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal*, he heard himself asking “so to pass through things eternal that we finally lose not the things temporal”. There is for most of us a danger that, like Lewis, we may subconsciously hope to get to heaven without having to surrender any of the worldly comforts and pleasures we enjoy.

Paul’s words in today’s epistle are a warning that it can’t be done. We have to order our lives in such a way that worldly worries and concerns don’t come between us and the Lord.

The Gospel Reading tells us what happened when Jesus had called the first group of disciples. *As soon as the sabbath came Jesus went to the synagogue*. Here is a simple reminder that Jesus was a loyal Jew, as were his first followers – a truth which Christians have sometimes forgotten, and which the recent observance of Holocaust Memorial Day should encourage us to take seriously.

In today’s Gospel Mark records two aspects of the activity of Jesus in the Capernaum Synagogue. First, *he began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority*. Mark, like other Gospel writers, sees Jesus fulfilling the promise made by Moses in today’s Old Testament Reading: *Your God will raise up for you a prophet...from among yourselves...to him you must listen*. Unlike the scribes, whose teaching could consist of the repetition of what earlier scribes had taught, Jesus speaks *with authority* – because he is the one of whom God has said *I will put my words into his mouth*.

The second thing Mark records is that Jesus commanded an unclean spirit to be silent and to leave the man of whom it had taken control. This is the first demonstration that, as Jesus had taught, *The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand*.

So in word and deed Jesus begins his ministry of proclaiming God’s reign over all things.