

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

This year we are reading the Gospel of Mark on the Sundays of Ordinary Time. Given that his is the shortest of the four gospels and that there are thirty-four Sundays, it means that virtually the entirety of his gospel will be heard across the year. Mark commences his account of the life and ministry of Jesus with his baptism in the Jordan. His focus is on the miracles of healing, one of which we hear this weekend, and the Passion narrative occupies a proportionately greater part of his gospel than it does in the other three. Mark does of course relate the content of Jesus' teaching but is more interested in how those people who first heard him speak reacted to what he had said and to the various miracles he had performed. Jesus never performed a miracle to prove a point nor to give credibility to his teaching. He was motivated by the suffering he saw and he sought to relieve it. Seeing others in grief, in pain or excluded from society by a disfiguring illness or disability moved Jesus to stretch out his healing hand.

Today's account of Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum raises some fascinating questions about his pedagogical technique and what it was made of him such a successful teacher. John's gospel account of his first meeting with those young men who became his disciples suggests that he lived in Capernaum and that he had a house there. Andrew, James, John and Peter expressed an interest in knowing where he lived and the evangelist suggests that not only did he invite them to visit his house but that they spent several hours in his company there. If Jesus lived in Capernaum one must assume he was a well-known figure in the town. So, the occasion described by Mark of his teaching in the synagogue was not the first time those who came to the synagogue on the sabbath day saw or heard him. It was not curiosity about the new teacher in town that drew them in such large numbers. It must have been the way he spoke, the content of his commentaries on the scriptural text put before him, and the way he managed to make it relevant to them in the here and now, which explain his impact. Their amazement came from the fact that, unlike other rabbis they knew, Jesus taught "with authority."

It is fascinating to speculate on what that perceived authority was. The evangelists never tell us anything about Jesus' appearance, nor indeed about the quality of his voice, nor about his body language when addressing a crowd. The explanation must lie in the impression he made on them, that he knew what he was talking about, that like the prophets of old - and we do encounter Moses in today's OT reading - God spoke through him. Or was it that they felt he knew God so well - they might have known that he spent forty days at prayer in the desert, or that he regularly withdrew to engage in private prayer to the God he called Father - that anything he said about God and what God expected of us was based on intimate knowledge? Or was it that he made the old language of the synagogue, the stock phrases of rabbinical teaching, the scriptural texts written in a distant age, relevant to the people of his day? I like to think that those to whom Jesus spoke - his disciples, faithful followers or casual listeners - in the language of love. I like to think that preaching today that speaks to the heart will be driven by love: love of the Lord and love of those to whom the words are addressed.

**Father Patrick**