

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)

1st FEBRUARY 2009

Jesus' teaching made a deep impression on them because he taught them with authority.

St. Mark tells us nothing about what Jesus said.

He is much more interested in the reaction of the congregation in the synagogue.

He gives us the listeners point of view.

He might have been one of them himself.

He might be speaking from experience.

Mark tells us that Jesus' teaching made a deep impression on them. This is weak translation of the original word. The people were not just well impressed they were astounded, amazed, astonished. Imagine the scene – people waking up, sitting up, straining to hear, looking at each other, excited – every deacon's dream.

And we don't know what he said. We don't need to. It was not what Jesus said but the way he said it.

He spoke with authority, unlike the scribes and Pharisees. They were the official teaching authority, but their method was to interpret what Moses and the other writers had written. They would say things like: "I think Moses meant this "or "the prophets say that."

Jesus was different because he spoke directly from his own experience as the Son of God. This personal experience of God gave him his authority. It was an authority direct from God, first hand, unlike the Scribes and Pharisees whose authority was second hand. Clearly the people in the synagogue thought that first hand authority was more convincing than second hand authority.

St. Paul had the same advantage.

As Fr. Stephen reminded us last Sunday, Paul had a dramatic and life-changing religious experience. He had no doubt that he had met the risen Lord Jesus on the Damascus road and that Jesus had spoken directly to him. As a result everything that Paul taught came from his personal experience of the risen Jesus. He, too, could and did speak with authority. Whenever his authority was questioned he simply claimed to be speaking in the name of the Lord.

That's one reason why his letters are part of our New Testament and read at most Masses. That's why we can trust the writing of St. Paul. He is writing from his personal experience of the Risen Lord. So we can take him seriously when he says: "I would like to see you free from all worry."

If only!

We really would be astounded if someone could set us free from all worry.
St. Paul is up for the challenge.

Look again at what he says. At first it looks confusing. Married people have had it. There's no escape for them. Single people need to stay unmarried. That does not sound very helpful.

Let's think again. Paul was writing to the Corinthians at a time when they expected Jesus to make his second and final coming soon, even tomorrow. It made sense not to take on unnecessary responsibilities.

We now know that Our Lord is taking considerably longer. He could return tomorrow, but he could wait another two thousand years in which case there would be no one left for him if no one marries.

Paul still has an important point to make to us. His message is that all we need worry about is being holy in body and spirit and giving undivided attention to the Lord.

We can do this as people working in the world and as married people if we try to do as both Jesus and St. Paul did. That is to seek to experience the Lord in our daily lives, to see the activity of God in all that is good, to recognise the guidance of God in all that goes well.

This requires prayer, not just words but time to think over what is happening in our lives, to recognise all that is good and all the possibilities for good, to reflect on our own experience.

If we can find God in our own experience of life we will be astounded. And if people ask us why we are astounded we can tell them that we have experienced God in our lives, not indirectly through Scripture and the Church, important as they are, but through our own experience.

Our own experience will be far more convincing and exciting for others than any attempt to explain Scripture or dogma.

If we speak from our own experience we will speak with authority and astound those who listen to us.

Rev Geoff Carey