

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

We are coming to the end of the Australian Open Tennis Tournament. Many of us have enjoyed this great feast of tennis over these last two weeks. Our enjoyment has been enhanced by the commentary of the matches by past players who know the game so well. Todd Woodbridge and Jim Courier have described many of the big matches. Leighton Hewitt has been in the commentary bunker these last few days. We listen to them because they have played on the centre court themselves and they speak with authority.

Today's gospel presents the beginning of the preaching of Jesus in Mark's gospel. Jesus is immediately hailed as someone who was different from the other teachers that people had heard. He was unlike the scribes and Pharisees. He was someone who taught with authority. People saw him as someone who was able to back up what he had to say about God, by acting in God's name to bring about healing and especially to drive out unclean spirits from those afflicted by them. He confronted evil and showed that he had the power and authority to overcome it.

As people watched and listened to Jesus they would have come to understand that for him to act with such power and authority it meant that Jesus was acting in the name and the authority of the one who gave him that authority. He was speaking and acting for God. What he said could not be rejected or ignored without rejecting or ignoring God.

Jesus was fulfilling what Moses was talking about in today's first reading. Moses told the people that God would raise up a prophet like himself to speak in God's name. People would need to recognize God's voice at work in him. Moses also reminded the people that nobody could presume to act as God's prophet unless he were sent by God and empowered by God to speak in his name.

Where does all this sit with us? I think that there is a special challenge in here for us, both in the ways that we listen to the Word of God, and in the ways that we proclaim that Word to others. We could ask first

how well we let Jesus speak to us about what is happening in our lives? Are we ready to bring what is happening to us each day to Jesus? Do we talk to Jesus about our day in a way that allows Jesus to advise us and guide us? Do we take whatever is troubling us to prayer with the openness to hear what may give us some peace and new direction?

I'm sure that many of you have been doing this for a long time. But I think that praying in a way that allows us to hear what Jesus may be saying to us comes only by practice; as does listening to the Scriptures with an attentive open heart. Do we listen to the Scriptures as they are proclaimed for us at Mass with the expectation that there will be something there that we need to hear today? Do we read the Scriptures during the week as a way into prayer that will nourish and support us?

Our baptism not only makes us disciples of Jesus, but also charges us with the responsibility of teaching others about Jesus. Some of us have the formal ministry of teaching others. We know that we cannot teach others with words alone. We can only teach with authority when people see us living what we speak about. I face that challenge every time I speak to you. Teachers in Catholic Schools know that their lives need to be deeply grounded in their relationship with Jesus if they are to support parents in their role as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. Those of you who are parents know how difficult it is to consistently model who you want your children to be. We all want to be like Jesus in the way that he teaches with authority.

To learn from Jesus as the one who teaches us with authority is to accept that there is something that we need to learn from him every time we hear him speak. May we open our ears and our hearts to whatever he wants to say to us today.