

## **Mark 1:21-28<sup>v vi</sup>**

They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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### **<sup>v</sup> About the Gospel: Mark 1:21-28**

Jesus' teaching in the synagogue and freeing a person possessed by a demon in the synagogue illustrate the nature of Jesus' message. Mark emphasizes Jesus' activity as teacher, but in contrast to Matthew and Luke, he gives less of the content of Jesus' teaching. Rather, he stresses Jesus' effective, powerful authority.

One manifestation of this authority is Jesus' exorcism of an unclean spirit. Mark does not tell miracle stories for the sake of arousing awe. He tells them to give witness to the meaning of Jesus' presence.

In the Old Testament, the title Holy One is used preeminently of God, but the same words are also applied to humans. As applied to Jesus, the term takes on the meaning of one who uniquely reveals the power of God.

In the first half of this gospel (1:1–8:26), Jesus teaches in veiled language (4:11), through action and parable. The authority of his "new teaching" (v. 27) is seen in its effect upon others. The description Matthew gives of the crowd's reaction to the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 7:28) is in Mark their response to Jesus' total self-presentation. Jesus' authority is manifested in his deeds and words. His destiny is one of obedience to his Father, not one of status.

### **<sup>vi</sup> Reflection and Response**

When our religion gets too cozy, and we become almost clubby with God, we need Deuteronomy's reminder. In those days, the deity did not inspire warm fuzzies. It inspired stark terror. The Jewish people begged Moses for a reprieve from the awful voice of God and the fire that threatened them with death.

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In view of their fear, God's intervention overflows with mercy. Rather than perpetuate that quaking distance, God agrees to send one like themselves, a kinsman. This action of profound empathy prefigures God's sending the Son, whose name means "God with us."

What kind of person is the Son? Like the residents of Capernaum, we ask, "Who is he, and what does this mean?" The Jesus of today's gospel is certainly no pastel, air-brushed embodiment of sweetness.

No, the God-man stands up to the worst this world can hurl at him. Jesus does not need high-tech special effects to defeat that force. Sharp, simple words are adequate because behind them coils the power of his character. Driven by holiness, he wields the supreme authority of good over evil. Those who find "gentle Jesus meek and mild" too sweet to swallow can look with awe at this towering figure of moral right.

For too long, we have equated Christianity with niceness and moral behavior with obnoxious smiles. Today Jesus challenges us to stand against evil and injustice with his rock-firm conviction and steely commitment.

We have no lack of demons. If you doubt, consider the cancers that infect every system: government, church, school and family. In the first category, we witness the after-effects of a "clean war." Millions starve while the diet industry flourishes in the U.S. Babies in the U.S. are born drug addicted. The numbing litany of oppression continues. But perhaps more important is our response. Do we turn away sickened, or do we confront boldly as Jesus did? He intervened on behalf of the individual and repulsed the shrieking spirit that threatened to invade and overpower him.

Robert F. Kennedy once told of a line scrawled on the pyramids: and no one was angry enough to speak out. "Well," he countered, "I'm angry enough to speak out." Are we?