

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (January 31st, 2021)

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

In the section preceding this God has told the people that when they enter the land which the Lord gives them, they are not to imitate the abominations of the peoples there: they are not to offer their sons or daughters as a human sacrifice in the fire to the god Molech to try to avert a calamity, nor are they to be involved with fortune-tellers, soothsayers, charmers, diviners, or casters of spells, nor consultants of ghosts and spirits nor seekers of oracles from the dead. (18:9-11) Prophecy is for Israel THE great means of mediation with her God, in opposition to the surrogates mentioned above.³

Moses spoke to all the people, saying:

15“A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen. The ONLY institution that will be permitted in Israel is that of the prophet, who, like Moses, will interpret God’s will for his people. In biblical thought the prophet is primarily God’s spokesman and not primarily a foreteller of future events.⁴

*16*This is exactly what you requested of the Lord, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let us not again hear the voice of the Lord, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die.’ At Horeb the Israelites were so intimidated by the divine presence, manifested in fire and thundering voice, that they asked that God not “speak” directly to them again but, instead, through a human intermediary.¹

*17*And the Lord said to me, ‘This was well said. Pleased with the request, God decides to grant it.

*18*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.’ For Christians, this points to the coming of Jesus Christ.²

*19*Whoever will not listen to my words, which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.

*20*But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die.” Here we look at a serious problem: the prophet who abuses his office and speaks an oracle that God has not commanded. God’s remedy is blunt: he shall die! The norm for distinguishing the true prophet from the false prophet is the accuracy of his oracle.⁴

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Paul is trying to be helpful in this selection. He wants to give good advice for hard times. Expecting the end of the world AT ANY MOMENT, he is telling the people of Corinth to focus on the essentials and to simplify their lives.¹ Paul taught that both marriage and its daily concerns would expire when the present age would come to an end. This put marital struggles and worldly affairs in perspective, since only one’s relationship with the Lord would endure forever.⁷ Years later when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians he had changed; for there he uses the relationship of man and wife as a type and symbol and sign of the relationship between Christ and the Church. When he wrote this letter to the Corinthians Paul’s whole outlook was dominated by the fact that he expected the Second Coming of Christ immediately and at any moment.⁹

Brothers and sisters:

³²I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. While Jesus did not make celibacy a prerequisite in his choice of the twelve Apostles, nor did the Apostles mandate it for those who presided over the first Christian communities, it has been the approved practice of the Church founded by Christ since at least early in the fourth century.⁸

³³But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided. Marriage involves spouses in many worldly cares that make it difficult for them to consecrate themselves perfectly and completely to the Lord's service. The married are tied by flesh and blood in many relationships that subject them to this world and can easily impede their complete dedication to God.³

³⁴An unmarried woman or a virgin The Catechism tells us that from apostolic times Christian virgins and widows have been called by the Lord with the Church's approval, to live in the respective states of virginity or perpetual chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven.⁶ (CCC 922) is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit. Here Paul uses the word "holy" to mean dedicated to God, consecrated, sacred, reserved for God and his service. Paul has the conviction that the last period of salvation history is running its course. The Parousia may come at any moment and so he teaches that virginity is a better state than marriage because it is better adapted to the contemplation of God and to the apostolic life.³ A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

³⁵I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction. Spending time reading, meditating on scripture, and then listening to the Lord is what makes the unmarried or married person spiritual. Paul is simply telling us that it is easier for unmarried persons to devote themselves more completely to God than for married persons to do so.⁵

Mark 1:21-28

²¹Then they came to Capernaum, This was Jesus' new home and headquarters in Galilee. It is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.¹⁰ and on the Sabbath The Sabbath is the seventh day of the Jewish week and it is set aside for worship and rest. Since Jews number the days from sunset to sunset, the Sabbath begins every Friday evening and ends at sundown Saturday.¹⁰ Jesus entered the synagogue This was a small building used as a gathering place for prayer, worship, and instruction in the Scriptures. Assemblies were normally held on the Sabbath in the evening. Since Jewish males were required to travel to the Jerusalem Temple only three times annually, the synagogue was a complementary site for non-sacrificial worship and education during the remainder of the year.¹⁰ The synagogue consisted mainly of a rectangular room built in such a way that those attending were facing Jerusalem when seated. There was a rostrum or pulpit from which Sacred Scripture was read and explained.¹¹ The law laid it down that wherever there were ten Jewish families there must be a synagogue. However, there was no music, no singing, no sacrifice and no permanent preacher or teacher. When the people met at the service, the administrator could call on any competent person to give the address and the exposition. There was no professional ministry

whatsoever. That is why Jesus was able to open his campaign in the synagogues.¹² and taught.

²²The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. The rabbis had the authority to impose a decision with binding force. The scribes, who were teachers of lower rank than a rabbi, did not possess this authority.³ When Jesus spoke, it was as if he needed no authority beyond himself. He spoke with utter independence. He cited no authorities and quoted no experts. He spoke with the finality of the voice of God.¹²

²³In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; This spirit was a demon or fallen angel.¹⁰ he cried out,

²⁴“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!” The demon confesses that Jesus is the “Holy One” out of fear, not genuine faith.¹⁰ We use this title in the Gloria: “For you alone are the Holy One.”

²⁵Jesus rebuked him and said, “Quiet! Come out of him!” Divine power is displayed through Jesus’ word. While most exorcists of the day recited lengthy incantations or used odorous roots to expel demons, Jesus simply commands the spirits and they leave.¹⁰

²⁶The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. The demons’ inability to resist Jesus is shown by their dramatic exhibition of “convulsing” and “crying”.¹⁰

²⁷All were amazed Jesus’ first miracle is, significantly, an exorcism, a sign that in his presence the power of evil is reduced to impotency. God’s rule is at hand!³ and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority. When Jesus teaches, things happen! His teaching is not just wisdom but power.¹³ He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” Even angels cannot rebuke Satan and his demons, only God can. Christ rebuked on his own authority but the angels invoked God and the apostles invoked Christ’s name. Both the apostles and the angels know that only God has the power to directly cast Satan out.¹⁴ Jesus performed exorcisms and from him the Church has received the power and office of exorcizing. In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of Baptism. The solemn exorcism, called “a major exorcism,” can be performed ONLY by a priest and with the PERMISSION of the bishop. The priest must proceed with prudence, strictly observing the rules established by the Church. Exorcism is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to his Church.⁶ (CCC 1673) On May 5th of this year, Zenit news service quoted Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea, an experienced exorcist who said that “Satan’s greatest triumph is to make us believe that he doesn’t exist. After the 60’s, many theologians said he was a symbol and this has been a great success because, of course, all the ministry of exorcism disappeared from Europe, almost totally. Only in Rome did it continue. However, the topic of the devil, which was the first to be swept away by the most modernist theology, is one of the ones recovering the most because the reality prevails.”

²⁸His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers” by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Martin Connell, (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “The Book Of Deuteronomy” by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., (5) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (6) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (7) “The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8)

“The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy” by Christian Cochini, (9) “The Letters To The Corinthians” by William Barclay, (10) “The Gospel of Mark” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) “The Navarre Bible: St. Mark,” (12) “The Gospel of Mark” by William Barclay, (13) “Mark: Good News For Hard Times” by George T. Montague, S.M., and (14) “Bible Basics” by Steve Kellmeyer.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.