

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sharing or exchanging pieces of information is especially important in our human relationships. It also plays an important role in our relationship with God.

God uses his word as a means of reaching humanity. In salvation history we see God putting his word in the mouths of his prophets to reach out to his people, to reveal himself to them.

The prophetic role of Moses is highlighted in the first reading, and we see the establishment of a permanent channel of communication between God and his people.

“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. Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.” (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

The point is Moses and other prophets serve as messengers of God’s word. They are chosen by God himself to bring his word not their word to the people. They have their authority from God because they speak in the name of God. And to grow and deepen their relationship between God and his people God expects them to have a total response to his word.

Anytime the word of God comes to us, God expects us to allow its transformative power to set us free. He expects

us to allow it into the areas of our life that need to be changed.

In the gospel Jesus goes to the synagogue, the place of worship, to take part in the worship. There in the synagogue Jesus is invited to preach, to share the word of God with the worshippers. The people are astonished at his teaching because he teaches with the authority.

The man with the unclean spirit feels the transformative power of God's word but he is afraid to be transformed.

So, he cries out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" (Mark 1: 24)

The point is the word of God does not destroy us, but it helps us to get rid of things in us that are unclean, that have enslaved us, that are destroying our relationship with God and one another.

Jesus, the word incarnate, has come to break the back of evil for us. He has come to restore us to full life and not to destroy our life.

In the second reading Paul reflects on the ways the social situations and commitments according to a person's state of life may pull him or her from God and a life of prayer even though our baptism calls us to devote ourselves to prayer and serving God. In the reading Paul expresses his preference for the celibate life, not because he believes it is the only possible state of life for Christians, but because he sees it as more conducive to

being free from the cares of the world and its values. Paul's preference comes from his desire that we devote all our time and energy to prayer and service to God and others. According to him, this most easily accomplished through celibate state. (Cf. Notes under the second reading of the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time in 2024 Workbook for Lectors.)

It is said that although the consecrated celibacy can foster closeness to God as Paul tells us, in the end it is virtue that makes saints. (Cf. George T. Montage, "Catholic commentary on Sacred Scripture: First Corinthians