



January 28, 2024

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

Mark 1:27



Dear Friends;

St Oscar Romero wrote,

*To know Christ is to know God.
Christ is the homily
that keeps explaining to us continually
that God is love,
that God is power
that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus Christ,
that he is the divine Word,
God's presence among us.*

What Archbishop Romero expresses is exactly what those people in the synagogue in Capernaum experienced. The empowering power of love. God was right before their eyes and seized them by their hearts.

I cannot tell you how sad I feel, when time after time, people tell me that they do not experience the presence and the love of God in the Catholic Church. They hear the word "No" a lot. They hear a lot about the rules. They complain that the preaching at most Catholic parishes is mind-numbing. My many siblings complain, *"All the priest does is re-phrase the Gospel and adds a few pious platitudes."* Nothing is thought provoking. There is no challenge other than rules. No fire for Christ or to change the world.

Part of the problem is careerism among the clergy. They want to play it safe and not rock the boat. Otherwise, they may not get a plumb parish, made a bishop, or become a cardinal. You cannot preach the Gospel when you are fearful. You cannot empower others with the Good News if you are trying to control everyone. You cannot speak of love if you have never experienced it. We need to pray that the clergy cast off the shackles of fear and discover the freedom of love.

When I was in the seminary many years ago, the fire of the Second Vatican Council was still burning brightly. There were many passionate priests and bishops on fire to change the world and preach the Good News. We were told when we preach, we need the Gospel in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Jesus did not come to help us escape the world but invites us to transform the world by the power of his own self-giving love. That is the power of Jesus.

Reading the Gospel is not like reading a biography. St Paul calls the Gospel the living power of God (Romans 1:6). The challenge of the Gospel is not just for preachers. We all must approach the word with faith in the living Jesus Christ, God's self-revelation. We must open our hearts and imaginations to hear Christ speak to us. St Oscar wrote, *"You must feel, though it be in silence/ without anyone speaking/ with deep faith in your heart/ that Christ is God's homily preaching to you/ while you try to fill yourself with Divine power that has come in Christ."*

Peace,

Sfr Ron

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