

Notes for Next Sunday

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:15-20). At Mount Horeb the people requested that Moses take the message from God and deliver it to them. But now that Moses is to leave them, he says that another spokesman will take his place, and then another will be necessary for the next generation. This is therefore a collective reference to the prophets who will follow. As such, it is also the basis for Messianic expectation and receives a unique fulfillment in Jesus.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 8:1-13). The rights and the freedom of the Gospel are wrongly promoted in the Corinthian Church, leading the believers to adopt too easily the behaviors and practices of the surrounding culture. No believer has the right or freedom to destroy the faith of others, especially those whom Paul describes as weak in the faith. Faith is not a private matter. Faithful Christians will be zealous to pray for and carry out God's will that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tm 2:3-4). How marvelously our Savior bears with our weaknesses! Most important, He took away our sin and builds us up in love.

Gospel (Mark 1:21-28). Jesus' authoritative teaching and power over the unclean spirits create an immediate stir among those beholding Him in the early days of His ministry in Galilee. Today, we often see the same thing. People continue to be interested in and even amazed by Jesus' teaching, and yet many fail to depend on Him for life and salvation. By the power of His authoritative Word and Spirit, however, others are indeed brought into saving faith and life.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below

OLD TESTAMENT – Deuteronomy 18:15-20

¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." ¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

18:16 let us not hear the voice of the Lord. The fear Israel felt at Sinai is the kind of terror people will always feel when they are faced with God's perfect demands and they must reckon with their own sin. We can't comprehend how fully we've failed to do what God wants us to do until we have tried our hardest and still we've fallen short. After we try over and over to be good but fail every time, we finally arrive at the frightening moment when we turn to God and say, "If there is any hope for me at all, it has to come from you. I can't do it!" (PBC)

18:17 The Lord acknowledged the appropriateness of their request. (TLSB)

18:18 my words in his mouth. "I will put my words in his mouth." Joshua is commanded to keep the Lord's words in his mouth (Josh 1:8). The Lord places his word into the mouths of other prophets as well. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

18:18 everything I command. This is wide variety of subjects: religion, domestic affairs, and foreign affairs. When the prophet speaks, the Lord speaks (Ex 4:15-16). (TLSB)

18:19 I myself will call him to account. To obey the prophet's words was to obey the Lord's words. To ignore the prophet's word would lead to divine judgment. The Lord made no similar declaration about the orders of an Israelite king. (TLSB)

18:20 must be put to death. Two types of prophecy are punishable by death: falsely attributing a prophecy to the Lord, and speaking in the name of other gods. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But the man who loves God is known by God. ⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. ⁷ But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. ⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

8:1 sacrificed to idols. Offered on pagan altars. Meat left over from a sacrifice might be eaten by the priests, eaten by the offerer and his friends at a feast in the temple (see note on v. 10) or sold in the public meat market. Some Christians felt that if they ate such meat, they participated in pagan worship and thus compromised their testimony for Christ. Other Christians did not feel this way. (CSB)

8:1 love builds up. Love guides relationships between Christians (cf ch 13), promoting mutual care. (TLSB)

8:4 an idol is nothing. There is only one God; all other "so-called gods" (v 5) are mere human creations. Cf Romans 1:22-23. Some Corinthians took this "knowledge" and decided that they could eat any food that had been sacrificed to the idols because the idols were not real. (TLSB)

8:7 since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. Because their moral outlook is not yet firmly grounded in a Christian perspective, they have a "weak" perspective on idols; they recall worshipping these very gods. When they see someone eating idol sacrifices, they think such people are worshipping the idol to whom it was sacrificed. (TLSB)

8:7 is delied. The Corinthian situation may be compared with the mission field, where new converts often find it difficult to rid themselves entirely of their old fears of witchcraft and ancestral spirits. In countries like Papua New Guinea, the earliest converts often resisted suggestions from missionaries that they use traditional musical instruments like the kundu drum in their worship services. They explained that they could not hear these instruments without hearing the voice of the spirits. Later generations of Christians who never participated in the pagan practices were able to incorporate the drum in worship. (CC)

8:9 your freedom. A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (LW 31:344) Though these two statements seem to be contradictory, they are in fact a scriptural depiction of one who is in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

8:9 the weak. So if a Christian felt he must refrain from idol-food, Paul assured him he was at no disadvantage; he was not missing out on anything. By the same token, the Christian who participated in these meals should not think he was in any way superior. (CC)

8:10 eating in an idol’s temple. A different situation from that in 10:14-22, where idol rituals were involved. Many Greco-Roman temples had what we would consider dining or banqueting facilities. Meals were commonly eaten there, particularly for business or social functions such as birthday or wedding celebrations. (TLSB)

8:11 this weak brother ... is destroyed by your knowledge. The weak Christian is influenced by the example of the stronger Christian and, though he feels it to be wrong, eats the meat that has been offered to an idol. The spiritual destruction that follows is explained in v. 12. (CSB)

8:12 wound their weak conscience. Eating meat offered to idols when they feel it is wrong tends to blunt their consciences, so that doing what is wrong becomes much easier. The result may be moral tragedy. (CSB)

8:13 I will never eat meat again. What might lead another to sin and unbelief is avoided in that person’s presence. Paul took a different attitude toward those who demanded certain practices as a basis of righteousness (cf Gal 3:10). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 1:21-28

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil ^a spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” ²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

1:21 began to teach. Jesus, like Paul (see Ac 13:15; 14:1; 17:2; 18:4), took advantage of the custom that allowed visiting teachers to participate in the worship service by invitation of the synagogue leaders. (CSB)

1:22 who had authority. Jesus never used the prophetic formula “thus says the LORD.” In contrast to the scribes, whose authority derived from the teachings they received from their forefathers, Jesus spoke as one uniquely authorized by His Father in heaven. (TLSB)

1:23 possessed by an evil spirit. Demonic possession intended to torment and destroy those who are created in God’s image, but the demon recognized that Jesus was a powerful adversary, capable of destroying the forces of Satan. (CSB)

1:25 Be quiet! Lit. “Be muzzled!” Jesus’ superior power silences the shrieks of the demon-possessed man. (CSB)

1:27 a new teaching. Jesus' teaching is supported by miraculous signs. Because of His deeds, Jesus needed no one to support the truth of His words. His actions spoke clearly for themselves. (TLSB)

1:28 whole region of galilee. Meant not only Galilee but also the territory surrounding it. His fame spread geographically to quite an extent.