

**Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - I am the Way, the Truth and the Life**  
January 31, 2021.

**This Sunday's readings remind us that the importance of the Good News (Gospel) is that it is the truth. We need to believe the God News. We need the truth to pursue what is truly good in life.** Remember last Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus says: "the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and **believe in the good news.**" (Mark 1:14). In this Sunday's first reading (Deuteronomy 18:15-20), Moses, about to part ways with the Israelites, promises them a prophet will be sent to teach them after he is gone. A prophet speaks on behalf of God, which is why the Lord is harsh on those who say their teaching is from God, or from false gods. The people of Israel were so frightened by the Lord on Sinai that they wanted someone who would speak to the Lord on their behalf. The prophet promised by Moses is Our Lord. Sent by the Father, he teaches us the truth about God's will for our lives.

In the Gospel reading (Mark 1:21-28), the crowds see something different in this young rabbi from Nazareth who is just starting his teaching. Why do his words have a weight on them that they didn't find in other scribes? This Gospel reading recounts an outstanding educational experience. The people of the Capernaum synagogue find that they have run right into the truth from a living, breathing man whose face they can recognize but whose actions they cannot control. Their encounter with Jesus leaves them amazed, puzzled and challenged. In contrast to their usual teachers, he speaks and acts with an authority that is undeniable. He speaks from the heart with enthusiasm for the truth. Because of who Jesus is and what he does, they realize, perhaps for the first time in their lives, that truth is personal. Other teachers are always passing onto them the opinions of past masters. They are accustomed to hearing what one great rabbi or another said about this issue or that. They are accustomed to believe those are the truth. For if the truth is a "what," there's reason to expect that you or I or all of us together can somehow master the truth, that we can bend it and twist its meaning to our purposes. But if truth is alive, if truth is personal, if truth stares back at us, then this expectation seems groundless.

Society today focuses a lot on popular opinions, but often doesn't go very deep. Today many people don't want to speak out at all for fear of being labeled as judgmental. At times, out of a mistaken idea, an apparently irreconcilable belief can be considered true: everyone's got their "truth," and nobody should question it. But if truth is personal and we see truth in the person of Jesus Christ who speaks on every aspect of human life - he does not offer what he has to say as a studied conclusion, but as rooted in reality and truth. Jesus makes it clear that he is the sole voice of God in the world, speaking the final word from God the Father. He emphasizes that what he says is the standard expected of us and the test we must pass if we are to reach heaven. He taught in the Capernaum synagogue 2000+ years ago, but this same Jesus is still present now. Mark's Gospel is all about people meeting Jesus and being impressed by him. His personal call to mission is how he approaches everyone personally. He is trying to provoke the question in his readers, "Who is this?" and variations of this question occur all through the Gospels. We need to answer this question for ourselves too—not the answer we find in the Catechism or in books – but rather, "**Who is Jesus for me?**" When Jesus looks in our heart, what answer does he find there? The first few lines of Mark's gospel contain the essence of Jesus's message. This is what all humanity has been waiting for—the coming of the Messiah. He calls everyone to be ready and respond to his call for repentance. **For us Catholics, we know Christ is present in the Eucharist, but that is not the only place to find him. Discover any truth, and one will find him, and when one does, listen to him.**

Though truth is personal, it never remains a private matter, something we keep to ourselves. We cannot have a private truth like we have a private toothbrush. Yes, each of us has a unique perspective on the truth, one that reflects our character and experience. Our different unique views of the truth find their validity when they are taken together. If then we are to educate the rising generation in a way that is worthy of them, we must help them to see that truth is personal, that truth cannot be controlled, that truth is a "who" rather than a "what." Personal truth means that our desire for control must die. We must commit ourselves to a far different existence, an existence where the presence of each can be an interaction and a blessing to all. If we are to provide the rising generation with the education they deserve, then we must help them see that truth is communal too. Children should know what it means to belong to a community of learners, a community that extends far enough to include their teachers, other adults young and old, even other children too. The classroom should not be a place where isolated individuals engage in a senseless competition, but a place where each person contributes and receives because each has a unique perspective on the truth and none holds a monopoly. In this way, children will discover that truth is personal and that truth dwells among them. They will not simply acquire knowledge, but they will experience wisdom. Their universe will not be void of great plans and purposes. Instead, a new health and a new sanity will be realized among them and among us. They bear the weight of truth.

So that is the Christian belief, but one needs not be a Christian to accept it. It belongs to an even wider wisdom. This understanding is one way that **Christ enlightens everyone born into this world.** As Pope Francis says in his monthly prayer intention for this month, *"May the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all."* I am sure something will resonate in all of us, Christians and non Christians when we hear the truth. And for the crowds in today's Gospel they know Our Lord's teaching rings true because they are spellbound and challenged to the core of their being by the compelling power of his words. Be it a call to conversion or a confirmation of the upright living for those people and for us, **we need the truth, and Our Lord is the truth.** The Gospel today has been preached for millennia, but it's the truth that sets us free. ***Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" ... If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*** (John 14:6, 8:31-32). Let's listen to Our Lord with renewed attention today through his Word, confident that it is the truth, and not be shy about helping others learn the truth, pointing their way to God as well.