

## Homily for 4th Sunday

God's authority in our daily lives is important. Who speaks for God? Do we want to listen to God? Are we interested at all in finding the meaning of life outside of ourselves? The challenges of the readings today keep pointing us outside of ourselves and toward a divine authority who wants to communicate with us but who will never force Himself upon us. The first reading today, from the Book of Deuteronomy, is really strong. God's people have told God Himself that they do not want to hear His voice directly! So God tells them that they will hear him now only through prophets. But real prophets, not the fake ones. We may think that there is something odd in not wanting to hear God, but so often we ourselves do not want to hear God in His Word, in His Scriptures and in His Church. Yet at times, if a really strong and charismatic personality comes and is able to preach the Word of God, there are times when we listen. We are no different from the people of the time of Moses! We need prophets when we don't listen to God. We need also to listen to God's words about false prophets—for they will die!

The second reading is from the First Letter to the Corinthians. We are told that the unmarried person is able to be more concerned to listen to the Lord and to seek the Lord's will. This does not mean such an unmarried person is better than a married person or even that such an unmarried person will actually be more concerned about the things of the Lord. I do believe, however, that Paul is getting at something more. It is this: When I look at my brothers or friends life- their spouses and children, business and profession, endless tasks involved just with house —I am utterly convinced that they reveal an encounter and intimacy with God that I never could. It is not necessarily higher or lower. But it is thoroughly different, marvellously diverse in contrast to my life. But I also believe that a single person, whether lay or religious or priest, reveals by his or her life a dimension of God's love and grace that a married person quite simply does not. To say the least, it reveals the possibility of a love which is greater than the loveliest gifts of this earth, a love through which all our earthly loves move and toward which all are drawn. And surely Paul would agree: If such a life is not, indeed, grounded in God, what a terrible waste it shall have been. The point, however, is always the same: listen to the Lord!

The Gospel brings us back again to this them of listening to the Lord. The people in the Gospel are totally amazed at Jesus and his power over unclean spirits. They could see that Jesus spoke as a person having authority on His own. Jesus defines authority as the exercise of God's life-giving and liberating power, the power that raises the lowly and fills the hungry with good things, that includes within the community those who have been living on the edge, the power that forgives those who have done nothing to deserve forgiveness. This is the power of the good Samaritan who took care of his fellow traveller even though he was a Jew; it is the power of the Father who welcomed his returning son, the prodigal, who had messed up; it is the power of the widow who in giving two copper coins to the temple treasury gave everything she had. Within the gospel's vision of life, these are the exercises of power that confer authority. But did the people of the Gospel follow the Lord? Not always! Even when the Word of God is right in front of us, we are still able to resist. God has given us this freedom to choose and so often we choose against God and thus also against ourselves. Let us pay attention today to the many ways that God comes into our lives. Let us seek to be faithful to the voice of the Lord as it comes to us in Scripture and in the Church. Let us pay attention to the things of God and rejoice when God sends us the strength to be faithful.