

Homily for January 28, 2018
By Sr. Margie Modro

In today's Gospel, Jesus proceeds to the synagogue to teach. It was the right of every Jewish man to do so. I was struck by the phrase "he taught them with authority." Jesus, in the view of the people, was a carpenter from Nazareth, a backwater, podunk town. With the sheer power of words, he convinced his listeners that he had something of value to share with them about their lives. His authority didn't come from a position he held, a title bestowed on him or any other earthly source. His authority rested in his divine inheritance. Jesus was not standing alone. When he spoke to the people, God spoke. He was free to speak without the constraints or concerns about the reactions of local authorities. He brought blessings to his listeners in the form of health and healing and a new perspective on the relationship of God to his people.

That day in the synagogue was a person of unclean spirit. This spirit had found a home within the heart of an individual and was freely able to spread the darkness. If you listen, you can hear the fear in the spirit's voice as he stands before the Christ. The spirit speaks in the plural. These spirits know who Jesus is and the power he possesses. Right before this event, Jesus had just battled with them and himself in the wilderness of the desert. Jesus liberated the person of unclean spirit from the grasp of evil and took away the unclean spirit's tool. His message showed that evil doesn't have ultimate authority over our lives. It is possible to overcome what is contrary to what Jesus reveals about the reign of God and the power of good.

Jesus didn't tell the people who he was, nor did he permit the spirits to reveal it to the crowd. I imagine Jesus generated a lot of conversation and a lot of questions for the hearers of his word and viewers of his actions as a result of the happenings in the synagogue on this day. He gave them ample material to chew on and to draw their own conclusions about who he was and where the source of his power was derived. How often we hear in scripture Jesus repeat the command to tell no one who he is because, I believe, he wants each of us to hear, to see, to taste, to touch and to discover for ourselves the truth of who he is and from where he garners his authority.

I chose today for the responsorial, Psalm 34 in the hymn written by John Foley. While on retreat in the high mountain desert of Arizona in 1995, during one of my meditations, I was overtaken by the beauty and the forces of nature that created the vistas before me. This is red rock country and some of you have been there with me, have prayed with me and gazed at the sunsets over Cathedral Rock, so you know from experience the overwhelming magnificence that compels you to take notice of nature. It says red rock, but in actuality, it is compressed sediment from what was the bottom of the ocean. As you step on it fine, red shards can flake off and eventually become the soil that supports the meager plant life.

That day I wrote in my journal the following: "Healer of spirits as I sit in this dry creek bed, I feel drawn into the earth, back into mother's womb that I might be born again and healed in broken places. Stone, strong, yet easily broken, pulverized to earth, creating anew in differing forms life again. From my own brokenness no less is expected. Then the words of psalm 34 came to my lips. 'The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, those crushed in spirit he will save.'"

In this psalm King David is reflecting on the difficulties he is facing in his life and asking God for respite. His concern was to have others join him in the lifting of their minds and hearts to God in prayer. He wants the hearers to savor the Lord, to taste, to know Him. The Psalmist doesn't say we will be exempt from the misery sometimes hoisted on us by life events and our reactions to them. He does say that God will provide refuge and comfort. God's grace will find us. We can be people of hope no matter the depth of our pain.

The psalm begins with the words "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." It is the recognition that we will never be abandoned and because of that reality, we can praise our God who walks beside us. Our relationship which God invites us to participate in, is a gift that will shape the trajectory of our lives, if we allow it. As Nan Merrill puts it in her rendition of Psalm 34's ending; "Though we are beset with many fears that cause illness and troubles, the Beloved is ever ready to lighten our heavy hearts, to ease our burdens, to comfort us in our sorrows. The Beloved renews the life of all who surrender to love."

My prayer that day in the desert was for God to set a direction for my life. What did God want me to do with the life I had been given? How did God want me to serve the people He loved? Since this experience my life has been dedicated to those who have suffered. For God's own reasons I believe I have been called to return to religious life and to live out this mission with my sisters here at Divine Providence and I have said "Yes."

Before we go to brunch I want to take this opportunity to thank you and acknowledge all the people's contribution to this day.

First the Provincial Leadership Teams and the General Leadership Teams who walked with me through this process of returning.

The Associates of Divine providence and my sisters, especially those most directly involved with my incorporation: Anne, Ana, Lisa, Patty, Carol and Paulita.

The staff here at Providence Height that help to pull all of this together.

My family, especially my mom, for their love and support over these many years.

There are guest from many parts of my life also present: UMPC Colleagues, Passavant Hospital Foundation, Parents of the Bridge to Hope, the school districts and parents where I served as a religious and during my time out of the community, my martial arts students, other religious and even my bankers. Thank you for everything

Rebeka and Fr. Greg thanks for all the help you provided for this liturgy and lastly Lisa you have blessed us with the gift of your voice. I am grateful.

Following the final song I ask my family & friends to follow me out of the chapel to go to the sisters dining room for brunch. There is another dining room across the hall from the main dining room for the overflow.