

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9](#)

[Reading II: 1 Corinthians 7:32-35](#)

[Gospel: Mark 1:21-28](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/012824.cfm>



Our first and third readings point toward authoritative teaching, either prophetic proclamations or authentic teachers. The ministry of a prophet is not principally about the future. It is about communicating God's message. The Hebrew word is nabi, a spokesperson. Prophets have a deep relationship with God and come to know the mind of God. They then share it with the community, sometimes by word, deed, poem, parable, or by acting it out. The prophets called to look at the present, recognize whether it is consistent with God's plan, or if people are moving in the wrong direction. The future aspect comes forth as the consequence of current actions. This path will lead to destruction, and that path will lead to life. They announce a message that people need to hear to live for God today.

Prophets are found throughout the Old Testament and are recognized in the New Testament. Many of them have a small role in addressing a situation while the famous ones address the nation. Prophets continue in our time and call us to face the truth. In baptism, we are each called to be prophets in our situation: in our friendships, as parents, as bosses, and as citizens. Prophecy is expressed through words spoken, articles written, actions taken, artistic expression, or many other means of expressing the truth.

Deuteronomy presents Moses speaking to the people of Israel. When Israel was encamped at the foot of Mt Sinai, they heard the sounds of the storm on the mountain when God and Moses spoke. They asked that they not be forced to experience the power shown in God's presence but that God send someone like Moses to deliver God's message. In Advent, we heard those who had been sent by the leaders in Jerusalem ask John the Baptist if he was the prophet (this one whom Moses spoke about). This passage also contains God's demand that the people listen and follow the prophet's declaration and warnings for false prophets.

Jesus comes as the authoritative teacher. He taught with I statements and did not rely on the sayings of Pharisaic leaders. His teachings were also confirmed by healings and the expulsion of demons.

Our mindset is very different from the thinking patterns of 1st-century Judaism. They believed in direct causality. If it rained, God wanted it to rain. There was no awareness of weather systems, high and low-pressure systems, or wind currents. Likewise, they did not know about viruses or the many causes of disease. All sickness was due to evil spirits.

We believe that there are evil spirits, creatures whom God has made, who choose to make themselves absolutes. They are manifest in the worst parts of our society and can impact individuals, but it is not usual. Jesus frees someone of possession, and Jesus continues to heal people.

The First Corinthian passage continues the theme from last week as Paul expects the world to end in a short time. The last phrase catches his central point: "for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction." Serving God should be foremost in our lives. Paul states that he is not imposing a restraint, so this is not a rule to be followed. Our situation is very different. We have a long journey that we are following. We need partners and companions on the journey. We enter friendships and commitments to help us adhere to the Lord more fully. Spouses, friends, and family can help us recognize God's work and presence in our lives.

Themes:

Prophets and prophecy

Discernment

Evil spirits

Authoritative teaching

Reflection Questions:

Have you experienced anyone sharing a prophetic message?

Do you recognize anyone as a prophet in our society?

What are some of the teachings of Jesus that have had a profound effect on you?

Where have you experienced yourself or others wanting to not deal with God directly but seeking others to be your authority?

Who helps you recognize God in your life?

How do you decide what is right, truthful, and life-giving? What resources do you use?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that the authoritative teachings of Jesus will guide and challenge us as we seek to be more authentic disciples

For the grace to be grounded in God: that each of us, whether celibate, single, married, or widowed, may seek God first in our lives and love others with the love with which God first loves us

For all who are single: that they may find a home in this community and share their time and gifts so that our witness to Christ may be more effective

For all who exercise authority: that they may use their authority as Jesus did, to free people, to heal the sick, and to build up the community

For all who are bound by evil: that the Spirit of Christ may release them from addictions, greed, anger, and vengeance so that they may live in the freedom of God's children