

[Spirituality](#)

[Pencil Preaching](#)



by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

January 11, 2021

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)



“What is this? A new teaching with authority” (Mark 1:27).

Heb 2:5-12; Mark 1:21-28

The Lectionary is providing treasures in both Hebrews and Mark that come together for us today. The Letter to the Hebrews may have been addressed to Jewish converts from the priestly class to reassure them that Jesus truly fulfilled the liturgical roles of the priesthood. The language is quite majestic, describing Jesus as “the refulgence of God’s glory, the very imprint of the divine being.” Such imagery and terms were reserved to absolute authority and divine sovereignty, why use of them in other contexts, like “shock and awe” to describe the American bombing of Baghdad, or calling the atomic bomb program “The Trinity” Project” and then dropping it on the Feast of the Transfiguration were seen by those who understood their significance as blasphemous.

The text of Hebrews has echoes of St. Paul’s conversion as an experience of “throne mysticism,” the supreme goal of Jewish spirituality, in which he beholds God and, to his utter amazement, the crucified and risen Jesus standing at his right hand. Paul is overwhelmed by the sudden realization that the person he was persecuting is the LORD. With this as background, we consider Mark’s story of Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum as another theophany that sent amazement and awe into the crowd, words also indicating a profound religious experience.

The crowd exclaimed that Jesus, unlike their own scribes, had real “authority” when he expelled the unclean spirits. These demons are only minions of some darker

power whose authority is now being overthrown by the Holy Spirit in Jesus. Satan, who has ruled humankind with lies and fear, is cast out by Jesus because he is the Author of all truth and love. Jesus is not just another healer or exorcist. He is LORD. The universe is not trapped between competing powers, Good or Evil, but is wholly under divine authority. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

While authority has often been seen as inhibiting individual freedom, the world has learned the importance of genuine authority in recent years. Evil thrives when common standards of fairness and order are flaunted. Failure to respect the essential authority of nature, truth, reason and science results in a breakdown of society. Rejection of political norms and the rule of law as applicable to all corrodes public trust and destroys civil discourse.

Jesus joined the absolute authority of God and the intrinsic authority of human community based on justice and love, the golden rule and the primacy of the common good. The crowds rejoiced to hear his stories, which rang true and promoted love. They heard the voice of his human experience and the voice of God in his teaching. Word met Spirit in Jesus, and everything he said and did had a graciousness that radiated from him. This is real authority. We will not survive or thrive without it.

Advertisement