

## Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

I remember when I was younger, sometimes the charge would be leveled against me – usually by my parents or grandparents: “You don’t listen to me.” Have any of you ever heard that – or said that – before? Usually, it’s shouted in frustration when someone doesn’t do what someone else is asking. For example, “I asked you to pick up your clothes off the floor three times now. Don’t you *listen* to me?”

What’s interesting about all this is that there seems to be a break-down in communication – between what’s being said and what’s being done. So, in the laundry example from above, obviously I heard the instruction to pick up my clothes the first, the second, and the third time – I understand English after all. But, then what happened? It didn’t translate into action. Probably, I kept on watching TV or doing whatever else I was doing at the time. And so, when the charge was leveled: “You don’t listen to me”, what’s really meant is: “You didn’t do what I told you to do.” But we still say – You’re not listening to me”. Either way, what do we say of someone who doesn’t do what they’re told to do? They’re disobedient.

Now, as you know, I love picking words apart to find out their roots. And actually, that word ‘obedience’ comes from two Latin words “ob” and “audiere”, which put together literally mean: “to listen to”. Hmmmm...now that’s interesting. So, to ‘obey’ literally means to “listen to”. So, when we’re being disobedient, we’re not listening to what we’re being told after all.

In today's Gospel from St. Mark, Jesus commands a certain unclean spirit to come out of a man in the synagogue. The result? "The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him." And the people, all amazed, turn to one another saying: "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they **obey** him." Yes, even evil spirits, when they hear the voice of Jesus, the Son of God, hear His command and listen to Him. Why? Because, as the same people in the synagogue identified earlier in this very same passage, this Jesus "taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes."

It's all about authority. Why should children listen to their parents to pick up their clothes off the floor? Because parents have *authority* over their children. That is, because parents have the responsibility to raise their children in the ways of virtue, faith, and responsibility, they have the necessary authority to command what's necessary to work toward achieving that goal. Similarly, Jesus, as God made flesh, came to reveal the Father's commandments so that we, His children, might become virtuous, faithful, and responsible children of God. In other words, it's all because of who He is – namely God – that Jesus has the authority to command us as He does.

The thing about authority though, is that like any good gift, it can be misused and manipulated. For example, mom or dad might command a child to go bring in the newspaper, cut the grass, or set the table for dinner, not because the parent is trying to form their son and daughter in virtue and responsibility, but because they don't feel like doing it themselves.

We can probably all think of other examples beyond family life of how rightful authority has been misused or manipulated – embezzlement in the government, abuse in the church, just to name a few. But because of negative experiences in the world around us, most of us become at least a little suspicious of authority. Even when it comes to the voice of the Church – which Jesus authorized to continue ministering and speaking in His name – we can become guarded. In this way, we might make excuses then, like: Who is the Catholic Church to tell me what I can and can't do with my body or in my free time? Who is the Catholic Church to tell society what marriage is and what it isn't? Who is the Catholic Church to command me to come to Mass every Sunday?

But, bad examples of authority – or rather, rightful authority being abused or misused – doesn't mean there is no absolute authority, and therefore, we can do whatever we want. If we all do whatever we want, then authority doesn't matter and, ultimately, chaos and selfishness rule supreme.

My brothers and sisters, as children of God, God has authority over us. But, He's not an exacting and vindictive God, who arbitrarily commands things that make life difficult. Rather, He's a loving Father, who knows what is best for His children. He is the artist who not only sees the big picture, but painted it in the first place. And so, even though we may not always understand, we are still invited and called to obey Him. A life of striving to be obedient to God, and not to the world, is what truly brings happiness and joy. May we seek to obey our loving God and be rewarded and blessed for our obedience. God bless you.