

**Homily for January 30, 2000
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28**

God's authority comes dressed in meekness.

“Come on now...did Jesus really do those sorts of miracles – those exorcisms?” I can hear people ask. That’s the sort of question we would ask out of our 21st-century mindset. But that’s not the kind of question the people who heard or saw Jesus would ask. The people of Jesus’ day were not skeptical of miracles.

Today only the most die-hard skeptic dismisses such accounts as unhistorical, but to say that Jesus did indeed perform exorcisms is not, by itself, to say all that much. Today we are too quick to jump from the admission that Jesus worked miracles to the conclusion that He was God. But our ancestors in the faith were far more sophisticated than we are in this regard.

To the ancient mind, the performance of a miracle was an ambiguous action. True, miracles did not happen every day, but they were part of the basic experience of that time – all of life was seen as suffused with the wondrous – God’s hand was at work in everything, and people of faith saw that. The question for witnesses of exorcism and miraculous cures was, by what power does this person perform such feats? One man’s miracle worker was the next

fellow’s charlatan. People could not deny that something had happened, but they were left with the puzzle of how it was done and what were the consequences for them and for their life? St. Mark does not answer the question as to whether the exorcism happened – he answers the question: “Is the power of God present in this Jesus?” And the answer of course is a resounding, and emphatic “Yes.” By His teaching – especially His parables – and by His miracles, Jesus demonstrated that God’s power worked concretely in human life and that those who would follow Him, would do the same. The exorcism, then, was not proof that He was “a son of God,” which some miracle workers would claim, but that God was effectively present and available.

And not only did God’s power rest in Jesus: all of Jesus’ followers shared in the same destiny as He. For those early Christians, belief in this miracle worker was at the same time their hope that God’s power at work in Jesus would continue to show itself in their own history – in themselves and in the lives of those they would touch.

Do we believe the same? ...That God’s power in Jesus is at work in you and in me and through us in others? In St. Mark’s gospel, Jesus is lifted three times and proclaimed the Son of God each time: lifted up out

of the waters of the Jordan, lifted up to a high mountain for the transfiguration, and lifted up on the cross. And each “lifting up” reveals the power of God, the glory of God available to us and to the world we touch. Notice that this powerful wonder-worker ultimately submitted Himself to become powerless on the cross. We who follow Him are called to teach and preach with power as well, and also to be willing to suffer as He did – believing that we too shall be raised and our efforts made complete, in God’s good time and in God’s own way.

We are not less confronted with the reality and power of the demonic today than people were in Jesus’ day, but we use the words of the social and natural sciences rather than “unclean spirits” to describe it. Yet evil still needs to be confronted, however we name it, and it must be challenged and exorcised. Evil, however we understand it, still resists being brought out into the light, squirms away from the touch of the healer, cowers in the presence of the power of love. We know this, not simply in daily headlines or in our own environment but in our own selves. There are things in each of us that we do not want to bring into the light, wounds that we resist healing or letting others heal, love that we refuse to trust. Dare we allow Jesus to cast out our demons and in turn to do the same for others through us? That becomes even more possible when we remember that the man possessed in the gospel comes before a God who is both powerful and vulnerable. It is, after all, Jesus our brother who comes to save us as God’s saving word wrapped in silence. That profound thinker Jacques Ellul says it well: “The one who... unravels the secret of history, who holds it and allows it to unfold as history is clearly not the all-powerful Lord: he is the immolated lamb. In the same way, the one who presides at the Last Judgement, at the

separation of the good and evil, at the condemnation, at the ultimate combat, is not the powerful athlete, muscular and majestic, of the admirable of the Sistine Chapel...it is not the ‘chief of the heavenly militia’; it is not the Lord of Lords, it is the Lamb crucified, the stripped, the annihilated, the weakest of all...the one who has neither beauty nor honor, nor power.”

...And we are the agents of that weak yet powerful Lord – God’s agent. And like the Lord Jesus, through us God’s authority comes dressed in meekness. For this we give praise.

As Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, “I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful.” ...And I might add, therein lies the power and the presence of God.

**God’s authority comes
dressed in meekness.**