

Jan. 29, 2012

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority...Mark 1*

Authority is a word we often hear invoked. *Authority* and *authentic* are words that are closely related. And they are meant to intertwine. But, the history of mankind shows so often that “authorities” are not necessarily authentic.

Adolph Hitler possessed authority. However Hans Jagenstatter who refused to serve Hitler and died a martyr’s death was authentic.

This week many of us mourned the passing of Joe Paterno, the legendary Penn State football coach. He can and will be remembered for the many positive things he did to help young men grow into manhood. But, like all of us do, he had a shadow side. At a moment of great need, the molestation of a child, he was not sure what HIS OWN authority should do, so he did the minimum, he passed the buck and passed on the matter to “higher authorities.”

Joe Paterno was not a bad man, but it is tragic that at a moment of opportunity he could not trust his own authority and prudence. He could have done so much more which would have been authentic consideration and action.

And in our own church, too many bishops were not so much bad, as they were oblivious, church status concerned, and as a result covered up. Their actions and the authority they claimed for themselves were not authentic.

So, today in the Gospel, Jesus boldly stands up and reads from the scroll. He is strong of voice, and reads what he believes and believes what he reads. And the people are convinced he is authentic, the real deal.

Then there is a verbal confrontation. A spirit of some kind confronts Jesus. Jesus does not rant or rave against this voice. Instead, he knows he need not. Quietly, he orders the unclean spirit to depart. He knew he need not confront a wicked spirit with a baseball bat. A quiet word was enough.

In a wonderful book, *Make Friends With Your Shadow*, the Lutheran pastor writes about each of us dealing with our shadow sides—those hidden corners—where evil tendencies or hidden lusts—we really don’t want to admit are a part of us, when they are a hidden part of everyone.

“Don’t hit them with a baseball bat, or say, Oh I could never follow those tendencies!”

You could! Instead gently chide them: “Be quiet now.” That authentic response will quiet them, only for them to come back some further day.

Breakfast Discussion: Who do you know that really seems to be authentic?  
Could Joe Paterno have done more than he did? Should he? Would you?

Personal Reflection: How do I deal with my secret desires, my shadow side?  
Never recognize it? Deny it? Make friends with it?