

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

I will raise up a prophet like yourself for them from their own brothers and sisters. *First Reading*

O that today you would listen to his voice! *Psalm*

Make sure everything is as it should be. *Second Reading*

His teaching made a deep impression on them, because he taught them with authority *Gospel*

Here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it! *Gospel*

Lord our God,
help us to love you with all our hearts,
and to love all people as you love them.
Old Opening Prayer

This week's readings if you wish to explore further
Deut. 18:15–20, Psalm 94 (95), 1 Corinthians 7: 32–35, Mark 1: 21–28

James Tissot (d.1902), *The Man Possessed by Devils*
Brooklyn Museum, public domain



He gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him ...

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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Year B, 28th January 2024

**O that today
you would listen to his voice!
Harden not your hearts.**

The readings this week reflect the **Psalm** response: *O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your heart.* This was the response of the Israelites when they grumbled at Meribah and Massah in the desert.

In the **First Reading**, Moses promises the tribes of Israel that the Lord will send them a prophet like himself, coming from within their midst, who will speak God's words.

We meet this prophet in **the Gospel**. It is Jesus himself, who amazes his audience in the synagogue by curing a man possessed by an unclean spirit. They are particularly impressed by Christ's quiet authority.

In the **Second Reading**, Paul seeks to reassure his audience in Corinth. They are worrying about marriage in the wider context of the end of time, which they think is imminent. They, too, must give their undivided attention to the Lord and ensure everything is as it should be.

This week, we might like to spend some quiet time with the Lord, perhaps resting in him without words and listening to his voice in the silence of our heart. He knows and understands our problems, and our great yearning for peace throughout the world.



Opening Prayer

Grant us, Lord our God,
that we may honour you with all our mind,
and love everyone in truth of heart.

First Reading Deuteronomy 18: 15–20

Moses said to the people: ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like myself, from among yourselves, from your own brothers; to him you must listen. This is what you yourselves asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the Assembly and the Lord said to me, “I will raise up a prophet like yourself for them from their own brothers; I will put my words into his mouth and he shall tell them all I command him. The one who does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name, shall be held answerable to me for it. But the prophet who presumes to say in my name a thing I have not commanded him to say, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”’

I come to the place where I like to pray, indoors or perhaps walking outside. Wherever I am, I take a few moments to come to quiet, and put aside any ‘to do’ lists which prevent me from focusing on my prayer.

Eventually I read the Scripture passage. It tells of something that occurred many centuries ago. I ponder: what is it saying to me today, in the world where I live?

The Israelites were a very diverse group, wandering in the desert, needing someone with the authority to lead them.

What kind of leader will the Lord send them? Where will he come from?

How will they know that he is genuine?

This may lead me to reflect on the leaders of today’s world. Were I to ask myself the same questions about them, what would my answers be?

What makes me trust or distrust them?

How much do their values matter to me?

Perhaps I am in a leadership position myself. What is my main motivation in leading others?

I speak with the Lord about what arises in my prayer, confident that he fully understands me. I listen intently.

Given the conflicts and aggression throughout the world, I may find it difficult to believe that God will send the peace-loving, compassionate, skilful leaders that we need. I ask the Lord for patience and greater trust.

In time, I close my prayer, thanking God for any insights he has given me about leadership and its difficulties and rewards.

Gospel Mark 1: 21–28

Jesus and his followers went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the Sabbath came he went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit and it shouted, ‘What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus said sharply. ‘Be quiet! Come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant. ‘Here is a teaching that is new,’ they said, ‘and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.’ And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

I may be coming to pray from a need to feel close to the Lord today, or because I feel I ought to or must pray. Whatever my reason, I take some time to slow down. I pause awhile.

When I am ready, I read the gospel passage. It may be familiar, but I spend time with it and read it slowly as if for the first time.

After a while, I may find that the whole scene arises in my imagination.

I am there with them. I see the people listening to Jesus, I hear the man shouting, I feel his touch as he tries to grab me to stop himself from falling.

I look around me at the faces of the group. What do I notice particularly?

For a few moments, I recall all the sounds, the cries, the words which I’ve just heard. What are the key words for me?

Maybe it’s ‘Be quiet!’ or ‘new teaching’ or ‘authority’ ... or something else?

I wonder why these particular words are important to me just now.

In what ways do they relate to my own life?

I speak to the Lord, and explain how this scene has affected me today.

Like the man in the synagogue, perhaps I also want to tell him – though gently and lovingly –

‘I know who you are, the Holy One of God, in you I trust’ .

Finally, I thank the Lord for being with me in my prayer today, and ask him to help all those around the world who suffer from poor mental health.