

## **“I Know Who You Are!”**

We pay attention to symbols of authority. Let's play a little game, and I will show you.

What are you supposed to do when you see the big red truck with the ladders, flying up behind you, lights and siren going, blowing his horn? ... Move to the side of the road and stop. GET OUT OF THE WAY. Because the Fire Department is on the way to save someone! What about when the car pulls in behind you close, and the blue lights go on? ... Pull over! Because you've done something wrong, and the Police need to speak with you!

But...what if some dude, some guy, some anonymous guy walks into the Church and sits down, then, when it's time for the homily, he just gets up and starts talking? Would you just sit there and wait to see what he said? Or would you call somebody? By what authority does this man get up in front of us and start talking to us? ***We don't know who he is!***

By what authority did Moses lead the Israelites? That one was easy. They *knew* who *he* was. He led them out of captivity! He opened the Red Sea for them to pass! He fed them in the desert! His authority was well-known. And in the first reading, God promises that Moses' successor would be raised up from among the people of Israel, so that they would know what God wanted of them. And God also warned them: people would have to answer for not listening to that prophet, that successor of Moses.

Jesus, in the Gospel, just *showed up*. He walked into the synagogue on the Sabbath...and started teaching. And people were *astonished*! An “unclean spirit” sees Jesus, and immediately recognizes who He is. The demon speaks Jesus’ *real* name, to try to overpower Jesus...and gets cast out! And people start talking!

It’s this buzz about Jesus, the reporting of what He did and what He said, that made people follow Him. Mark’s Gospel reports that “the whole town was gathered at the door” of the house where Jesus was staying, wanting to get to Jesus.

That same “buzz” about Jesus, in a way, is why *we* show up at Church. Most of the people who followed Jesus didn’t directly see Him perform a miracle. And certainly, those who became Christians *after the Ascension* never saw Jesus *do* anything. So why did they decide to follow Him? They *followed* Him *because of the witness of the people who were already His followers!* It was *their* lives, and

in some cases, their *deaths*, that convinced people that Jesus was the Messiah!

They knew who He was!

And that's why *we* are here. The faith of those who preceded us helps to form our faith. And the sacraments, left to us by Jesus as visible signs of invisible grace, are the nourishing stream that we return to, again and again, to strengthen that faith.

But, by what authority does the *Church* do this? Who is the *Church* supposed to be?

That is the question we all have to answer, brothers and sisters. And it boils down to who we see, who we hear, when we sit in this space. By what authority does the Church minister?

And the much more important question: Who is the Church to tell *me*?

When the Church tells us that we shouldn't use artificial contraception, that our marriages ought to be open to life; when the Church tells us that we ought not receive the Eucharist if we are in a state of mortal sin; when the Church teaches us that our sexual expression should be confined to marriage, and not dishonored by being used at our whim...who do we hear?

As hard as it is to hear, with the culture shouting out to us that we ought to "do our own thing", The Church, the Body of Christ, teaches with the same

authority Christ gave the apostles! So when the Church teaches, we should be hearing Christ!

Of course, if individuals in the Church teach us wrongly, they are accountable. If I “speak an oracle that [God] has not commanded [me] to speak”, as Moses said in the first reading, I am accountable. But that is why this isn’t the Church of Chip Jones. It’s not about what *I* think. It’s about who Jesus Christ *IS*!

At the end of the day, brothers and sisters, that’s the question. Who *is* Christ?

The unclean spirit, the one in the man at the synagogue in Capernaum, *knew* who Jesus is. The people listening to Jesus teach in the synagogue *knew* who Jesus is. The people, who gathered outside the place where Jesus was staying after he spoke in the synagogue, knew who Jesus is.

And through the centuries, those who have *given their lives* to Christ *knew* who Jesus is. Likewise, those who have given their lives *for* Christ, those who shed their *blood* for their faith, knew who Jesus is. And it is *their* witness that builds up *our* faith.

Jesus is not some random guy who wandered into our midst. We have the whole of the communion of saints to tell us who He is. And he may not come with

lights and sirens, but His authority, His power to change our lives, is evident all *around* us, if we pay attention.

A demon in a possessed man saw Jesus and yelled out, “I KNOW WHO YOU ARE!!”

Can we say the same thing? And given that we can...can anyone else *tell*?