

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time • Year B

January 28, 2024

### *Readings*

Dt 18:15-20

Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9

1 Cor 7:32-35

Mk 1:21-28

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Arthur P. Purcaro, O.S.A.  
*Villanova University*  
*Villanova, Pennsylvania*

Barely a month into the new year and perhaps feeling a little uneasy about those new year's resolutions, the Scripture passages for this Sunday can serve to light a spark or encourage us on our journey together as the People of God, inspired by the mission Jesus shares with us: announce in word and deed the Reign of God among us.

We are reminded today by the incident in the synagogue at Capernaum that Jesus came to heal us, to make us whole. All of us, and all of creation since everyone and everything is interrelated, interdependent.

Grace, which by definition is not earned or deserved but is a freely given gift, builds on nature, drawing us out of our default lifestyle characterized by self-centered individualism, encouraging us to grow in our relationships, entering more fully into communion with God, ourselves, others and nature. We are reminded that this is who we are called to be – the image and likeness of God – and that the journey is not undertaken alone but with God, in community, encouraging one another to remain steadfast, providing us the solidarity of other wounded healers to lend a hand and bolster our resolve.

The life we have been promised can be lived in anticipation as we gather to celebrate the sacrament which in our Augustinian tradition is called “sacrament of love, sign of our unity, bond of

our fraternity.” The community founded on Gospel values for the purpose of building up the Reign of God is necessarily an alternative to contemporary society which has grown accustomed to place the person at the service of a consumer-based society. Our joining together at Eucharist says very clearly to society: we are not enough; we need God. At the same time, our active participation in the sacrament helps us all understand that God has shared responsibility for the Reign with us. Each one of us has something to contribute toward the building up of God’s Reign.

In a world where it is has become acceptable to see hordes of homeless, and allow innumerable people to endure malnutrition while growing in despair in the face of indifference, discrimination and oppression, our community is the figure which stands out and says, in word and deed: this is not God’s plan. The Reign of God, always a work in progress, strives to grow toward the goal of enough, for all, forever.

However, standing up for Gospel values is not an easy thing to do; the accusation of “hypocrite” and “self-righteous” have not been bandied about without foundation. With an authority founded in humility, as in the case of Jesus in the Gospel passage today, relying not on ourselves but rather on the God who longs for the Reign to become a more present reality, our prophetic witness can encourage others to assume their personal role and give witness to the lifestyle it entails.

Sixteen centuries ago, St Augustine, inspired by the Gospel, drew up some guidelines for this way of life, called a rule, meant not only for those who today we know as religious men and women but rather for any and all the baptized who felt called to live out their baptismal commitment of building up the Reign of God here and now. The Gospel is radical and so is Augustine’s *Rule*, in the sense that it goes to the core of our life, the heart of the matter. Many of these guidelines stand in direct contradiction to contemporary lifestyle, causing conflict, which can produce light (as well as

heat), showing the way, just as we heard happened in today's Gospel passage.

I share with you some brief excerpts from Augustine's *Rule* and encourage you to consider how they could challenge you and all of us who belong to the community of followers of Christ to grow in holiness.

*Do not look down on others.*

*Glory in the companionship of the less privileged*

*Pride lies in ambush even for good deeds.*

*Persevere faithfully in prayer.*

*Ears should hunger for the Word of God.*

*It is better to need less than to have more.*

*You should not try to please by your clothes but by your behavior.*

*Correct one another with love of the person and hatred of the offense.*

*Be concerned more about the common good than your own.*

*Do not have quarrels or at least bring them to an end as quickly as possible.*

*When you pray to God meditate in the heart on what is expressed by your lips.*

*Honor God in one another whose temples you have become.*

We turn to the table of the Lord, nourished by his word and example, in order to see what we are challenged to become: the Body of Christ, in and for a better world, for all.