

#### FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (1/31-2/1/2009)

*Deuteronomy 18/15-20, Psalm 95, 1 Corinthians 7/32-35, Mark 1/21-28*

In a sense, the whole world waited on President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address recently. We may not know how the rest of the world is viewing his coming presidency, but here in America, there are high hopes for – well, in a word, miracles.

Can he re-start the economy? Can he extract us peacefully from Iraq?

Can he be helpful in settling the on-going Palestinian question?

Will he be effective in addressing global warming?

Will his term in office be marked by a preference for life, and not a culture of death?

So many questions, but we better resign ourselves to reasonable possibilities, right?

Appropriately enough, our Gospel message today speaks of another inaugural address.

It is Jesus' initial appearance in the synagogue of his home town, and, while *Mark* does not record his first words on that occasion (we have to go to *Luke 4/16-22* for that), he does set the scene.

The text says: "*The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, not as the scribes.*"

What is also interesting is that there was a possessed man in the congregation.

We don't exactly know what that meant to the people of the first century.

Was he truly possessed by the devil, or was he a man caught up in a terrible mental illness that showed itself in hallucinatory incidents?

Whatever, the man was sick by any description.

Yet, even in his illness, he, more than anyone else present, recognized the power of Jesus.

*"What have you to do with us, Jesus? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!"*

Jesus took no guff from the unclean spirit and ordered him to shut up and get out; the demon had no more options after that.

As expected, the other spectators were amazed that Jesus could control even the unclean spirits.

You might reasonably ask what possible application can this have in your lives?

The Alleluia verse before the Gospel offers some insight: "*The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen.*"

Say what you will, there is a ton of darkness in people's lives these days; a recent survey suggests that people are unhappier now than they have been in over 35 years.

And it isn't all about the economy.

Some of the impetus for the unhappiness undoubtedly comes from without, but an awful lot, we suspect, is self-induced.

In other words, we choose and enjoy many of our own poisons.

The good thing about the demons from within is that we can, with the Lord's help, do something about them.

We can change; we can accept the light Jesus brings, the teachings he espouses, the Spirit he engenders.

We don't have to be victims, you know; we can always join up with the Lord!