

“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” These familiar words from the psalm remind us of the importance of God’s Word in our lives. In His word, God reveals to us His great love for us, His desire to save us. But God’s word also reveals His desire that we should to accept his word and that we should respond to it.

From the beginning God revealed Himself to His people. He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He entered into a covenant with Abraham. And this revelation came to a crescendo in Moses. God revealed Himself to Moses in a new way. God revealed His name to Moses: I AM WHO AM. He used Moses to redeem His people from slavery in Egypt. And He gave the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Yet, this is not the completion of God’s revelation to His people. As important as Moses was for the Hebrew people, someone else was still to come. This is what Moses shared with the people in the first reading. “A prophet like me will the Lord raise up for you from among your own kin; to Him you shall listen.”

This prophecy of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Jewish people begin to recognize this in the Gospel today. St. Mark says that the people were astonished by the teaching of Jesus. They recognized His teaching was different than the teaching of the scribes. Jesus taught with authority. And if the authority of His words wasn’t enough, Jesus then gave further proof of His power and authority. When the possessed man entered the synagogue, the

demon immediately recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God. The demon recognized that Jesus has the power to destroy him. And then the authority of Jesus became even more clear as Jesus used his power to speak a word of freedom to that man. The demon was forced to flee by the authority of Jesus' Word.

Unfortunately, in our familiarity with the Gospel, in our familiarity with Jesus, we can start to lose a sense of the power and authority that Jesus commands. That's why it is important not to miss the reaction of the people who were there. The people were astonished at the teaching of Jesus; they were amazed at His power to cast out demons.

This should be our response, too. Jesus continues to speak with authority. As Catholics, we believe that Jesus speaks now through the ministers of His Church. Jesus continues to draw us into the Church through the blessed words of priests and deacons, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus continues to cast out demons through the ministry of exorcists. When a priest says, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," our sins truly are washed away. When, at Holy Mass, the priest says over the bread and wine, "This is my Body," "This is my Blood," a real transformation happens! This is the power and authority of Jesus' words. We should be astonished and amazed at this power and authority!

And the Lord longs to speak to us in our daily lives. Through silent prayer, we can hear the power and authority of Jesus' words as He offers us the graces that we need. In the words of people we meet, we can find the power and authority of Jesus' words as He uses other people to remind us of His love and compassion and healing and consolation.

But we will only recognize the power and authority of Jesus if our hearts are open to His words to us. So often in Scripture, God's people had hardened their hearts to God. They could no longer hear His voice, they could no longer recognize His love for them because they had closed themselves off to God's voice. Do we follow this pattern? Do we close ourselves off to the voice of God by the many distractions in our lives? Do we harden our hearts by our sins, especially mortal sin which cuts us off from the grace of God? If our hearts are closed to the Lord, His power and authority can bring healing and mercy.

The Lord never stops revealing His love for us. He never stops reaching out to us with power and authority to save us from evil and to lead us to new life. Let us pray for the grace to open our hearts to God who reveals His unending love for us. May we hear His voice today and may we harden not our hearts.