

*Don't listen to them!* (Mark 1: 21-28)

\* The scripture reading from the Gospel of (Mark 1: 21-28) is one of the lessons assigned for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. Mark tells what was going on in the synagogue. While people were listening to Jesus they were amazed because "he taught them like one who had authority, not like the experts in the law." Soon after seeing a man with the evil spirit, he drove it out. That was a sign of his supreme authority. Those in attendance were doubly amazed after that, according to (v.22).

\* Friends, you know, once I practiced exorcism in my home town, almost twenty years ago. There was a meeting in the clubhouse with about 100 people in attendance. While my Finnish friend, pastor Y. K., was preaching, I kept watching the audience. Soon I noticed as a certain man who time to time lifted his hands up and down similar to what we call a waving motion. He tried to upset the speaker and withdraw people's attention. When Y. mentioned the bronze serpent as a prototype of our Saviour, suddenly, the man fell on the floor, having been seized with convulsions. No doubt, it was a very vivid illustration of demonic appearances. Soon after we came up to that man, he was on the floor in convulsion. We saw the foam in his lips, his eyes were rolled up. (Mt.17:15 ESV). In the presence of many witnesses, by the name of the Lord Jesus, we commanded the demon to get out from the man. What a shame it was, the demon refused to recognize our authority. The man continued to struggle with epilepsy until he was taken in the hospital. Fortunately and unfortunately our listeners had quite different experiences. They saw the man possessed by the demon but they didn't notice the humble servants of the Lord.

\* Now let's see what the next message from Old Testament for today's reading teaches. It says that after Moses God will rise up another prophet "like unto me." The phrase like unto me identified the coming prophet as an intercessor and deliverer. This was a prophetic reference to Jesus Christ who fulfilled the prophecy of Moses. Philip told Nathanael, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write ..." (Jn 1:45). "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed," (1Pe 2:24). He was appointed as the Chief Priest, King and Prophet. From the hands of God Father we received commandment, "... Listen to Him," (Mt.17:5). Our text also addresses the message to the community of believers whose charge was to discern the false prophets and put them to death.

\* Reflecting on the passage from Mark ch.1 we read that Jesus discerned the false prophet in their synagogue and then killed him, spiritually. Jesus stripped prophetic power from a man by casting a demon out of him. He said, "be quiet!" and the man stopped to prophecy. Jesus ceased him, there was not a false prophet in the synagogue anymore; the evil spirit left him forever. Friends, how would you handle the situation if in your midst arose a false prophet? Can we follow Jesus in his way or is there one negative example that you've heard from me? No doubt, we may follow Jesus if we are given; but if not? Better to be humble. What in the world is that?

Good question! Just pretend to be a dead. How can it be? First, don't believe that prophet. Second, plug your ears. And third, give your ears to Christ. The false prophet is powerless if you don't listen.

\* But the most difficult thing in the case with false prophets is an identification. The (1Jn 4:1) says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." The observation of the temporal Christian world shows that the existence of false prophets among us has never ceased. "... many false prophets will rise up and deceive and lead many into error," says (Mat 24:11). Here are some names of false prophets on the aged pages of history from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries after Christ: Gnostics, Marcions, Adoptianists, Monarchianists, Apollinarianists, Arianists, Manichaeists, Pelagianists, Montanists, Nestorianists, Docetists, Donatists, Monophysits and cetera. No wonder, there are many false prophets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well, let's call them Enthusiasts. Some of them can be discerned easily but some of them can be very skilful, like the crafty wolf from the Russian fairy tale, "The Wolf and the Nanny Goat." Here it is the story.

\* Once upon a time there lived a nanny goat and her kids. The nanny goat often had to go into the forest while her children remained at home. Before leaving she used to warn her children saying, don't let anyone come in, keep the door locked. When the nanny goat came home, she tapped on the door and sang: "Dear little children, dear little babies, Open the door, lift the latch, Your mother has returned bringing milk." The children heard their mother's voice and opened the door. But a wolf also heard. When the nanny goat left again, the wolf crept up to the little house and sang in a gruff voice: "Dear little children, dear little babies, Open the door, lift the latch, Your mother has returned bringing milk". Listen! Listen! Exclaimed babies. That is not our mother's voice! Our mother sings in a high voice! The wolf hurried to the blacksmith in the village. Blacksmith, Blacksmith, Make me a high voice Or I will eat you! The Blacksmith made a high voice for the wolf. The wolf went back to the goat's little house, He knocked on the door and sang: "Dear little children, dear little babies, Open the door, lift the latch, Your mother has returned bringing milk". The little goats heard the high voice and opened the door. The wolf leapt into the house, grabbed all the little goats and ran away. Only the very smallest goat had climbed into the stove, and the wolf didn't find him. When the nanny goat returned, the baby goat cried out, "Mama, Mama, a grey wolf came, He grabbed all of my brothers! Oh, woe is me!," exclaimed the nanny goat. Then she went into the forest to find the wolf. She saw him asleep under a bush. She went toward the bush and bucked him with her horns. The wolf jumped up and ran away, and the little goats came out safe and healthy. The goats went home, and began to live happily ever after keeping in mind the lesson.

\* It is clear, the baby goats were able to identify the difference between a soprano and bass voice very easily. Like Gnostics, their gospel from Thomas is evidently different from John's Gospel. Or the Mormons, their teaching is very distinctive. Unlike the true prophets the false usually blend truth with errors or compromise

spiritual knowledge by reason, some of them can not be discerned easily. In addition to that, they may be influential, gifted and attractive teachers. Here are a few common rules that can help us to discern the false prophets. The (Mt.7: 18) says that a tree can bear only the fruit of its kind. Therefore, according to God's order for creation: "*the land produces vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.*" (Gen 1:11). In so far a bad tree can not produce good fruits because it would be worked against the law of creation. This same rule we can apply for the false prophets even though they camouflage themselves in sheep's clothing. First, they can be distinguished by teaching; and second, by their ungodly behavior that must be accepted as the most vivid mark against all false prophets.

\* Mt 7:21-23 says, " On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!'" Therefore, some teachers who might teach and explain the Word of the Lord according to its Spirit but live a life of lawbreakers should not be listened to because they are false prophets. Here is a quotation from "Didache," known as the rules of the apostolic fathers, " .... Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet. .... But not every one who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; but only if he holds the ways of the Lord. And every prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet." Thereby teachers, who don't practice what they preach, should be identified as false prophets. Doesn't it surprise you? I heard many times the conviction that the false prophets can be discerned only by what they teach but not by their behavior. The opponents say, the false can behave very well, even much better than we. Friends, I tell you the truth, such opinion is fantasy. The problem here is that they are very crafty and some of us still conduct ungodly life.

\* Friends, You are not able to cease the false prophets as Jesus did in Capernaum; rather you should focus on yourselves. Be alert to whom you listen to, trust, follow and like. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." There is no darkness in Jesus Christ; There is no lie, no fault, no impurity in his way. Once again upon hearing His Voice let's give Him our ears. After that He will be able to produce in and through us amazing things, even casting out of demons. In the end we will pray. Dear Heavenly Father, help us ,save us and preserve us by your grace from the destructive teachings of the false prophets so that we can live godly and peacefully in the midst of storm and finally, in the end of the ages let us to be amazed with your splendor as the beloved children of the Heavenly Father.

Beloved, grace be with you all.

Amen

