

**FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY**  
**Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**January 31, 2021**  
**“Lawful Teaching Authority”**

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Brothers and Sisters,

We are presently in Ordinary Time, and therefore our focus is not on any particular liturgical season, such as Christmas or Easter. The readings, therefore, give us an opportunity to address a very important duty of the church, that is, her duty to faithfully teach the Word of God.

The first reading taken from the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that God would send to his people prophets. God will then speak to his people through his prophets. God said he will put his words into the prophet’s mouth. The prophet is to tell the people all that God commands them to do. And anyone who will not listen to the words of God coming through his prophet will have to answer for it. The prophet is bound to speak only the words God gives him, under penalty of death. (Dt 18:15-20).

The prophets were specifically tasked to teach God’s law to his people. Some prophets were priests, such as Samuel. (1Sm 3:20; 7:17).

Later on the scribes and Pharisees would become the principal teachers of the Law of Moses to God’s people. Jesus himself would acknowledge this to Nicodemus.

Jesus said: “They sit on the chair of Moses, therefore do what they tell you.” (Mt 23:2). All teaching authority comes from God and is handed on to those he designates, as we saw in the first reading.

In the Gospel, we see that Jesus went to the synagogue. (Mk 1:21-28). The synagogue was the usual place one went to learn about the law of Moses.

Jesus was not a scribe or a Pharisee, so he would not have been considered a teacher of the law, yet it said he entered the synagogue and began to teach, and he would later be referred to as “teacher”.

It said that the people were spellbound by his teaching, because he taught with “authority” and not like the scribes. And through this authority that he possesses as the Divine Son of God he will drive out of a man “unclean spirits” and they will “obey” Him.

We are talking about teaching and lawful teaching authority. To carry on His mission of salvation, Jesus will establish His Church, which begins with

his 12 apostles. In fact, the event in the synagogue takes place after he called his first Apostles, Simon, Andrew, James, John.

As God the Father sent prophets to speak his word to his people, now Jesus His Son, is sending his Apostles to proclaim his teachings.

We know that his Apostles had the teaching authority of Jesus because he said to them:

“He who hears you hears me”. (Lk 10:16 --)

“He who receives you receives me.” (CCC 87 & 858)

“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven.”

The Apostles are the first Bishops of the Church, and therefore, the Bishops as a body have the teaching authority that Jesus gave to His Apostles. Today’s Bishops of the Church are, in fact, Apostles. Paul gave his teaching authority to Timothy (2 TM 1:13-14).

The Pope – the Bishop of Rome has the duty to ensure that the teachings handed on by the original apostles is the same teaching the Church follows this present day. From Christ he is given the three offices of teaching, governing, and sanctifying.

Each Bishop is responsible for what is taught in his diocese in all the parishes. Each Pastor of a parish is responsible for what is taught regarding faith and morals in his parish.

**The line of teaching authority goes from:**

**Pope → to Bishop → to Priest.**

All three teach, govern, and sanctify in the name of Jesus Christ.

By his authority, Jesus drove out evil spirits, and they obeyed him. He gave that same authority to His Body the Church – through official exorcisms.

There have been some Bishops and priests who have failed in the duty to be faithful to the teachings of Christ. These are called Heretics. (i.e., Arius and Martin Luther).

In our Catholic schools, universities and seminaries, teachers are required to sign a “Mandatum”. A Mandatum is a statement saying that they will stay faithful to the Doctrine of the Catholic Church in their teaching and in their writing.

The pope, bishops, and priests hand on to the faithful what they have received from those before them, they are stewards of what Jesus has given to

His Church. The first task of a steward is to be faithful and obedient to his master Jesus Christ. They may not change doctrine, they defend it.

How can you tell which are faithful and which are not? “You will know them by their fruits,” Jesus said.

The doctrine of the Catholic Church is orderly and organic.

- It is orderly because it reflects the vast order of the universe, God’s creation.
- It is organic and cohesive because nothing is contradictory.
- It fosters peace and harmony upon all who adhere to it.
- It is the gentle yoke of Christ, which is not burdensome to its believers.
- It is the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

You know that church doctrine is true and has its origins in God because the devil and his minions rail against it.

Truth is known by her enemies.

Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church