



January 31

THE NEW SHOFAR

Christ Jesus is the voice of God in us

If today you hear my voice, do what I ask of you

I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet

This part of the Book of Deuteronomy is made up of speeches by Moses recalling Israel's past, reiterating laws he had communicated to the people at Horeb (Sinai). They emphasise how observance of these laws is essential for the well-being of the people in the land they are about to possess. God has expectations of them, demands of them as His children and the richness of life in the land of Canaan (the metaphor is *a land of milk and honey*) depends on this obedience.

Deuteronomy is a collection of texts from ancient traditions gathered together around 640 B.C. It formed the basis of a spiritual renewal of the people. They had sinned by failing to heed the warning of Moses and listened instead to the attractive voices of the peoples of the land of Canaan. Yahweh God had become but one voice among many. These godless voices were making all kinds of promises, various visions of what life should be like and could be like if they only took up these pagan gods.

O that today you would listen to his voice

This same message/warning is repeated for us in Psalm 95. This is the psalm the Church still uses in its daily Morning Prayer. As Christians go about their daily activities, they are called upon to understand how those works are to be performed in the presence of God. We go into the world as though we are going into the Temple of God, into the divine presence and therefore we must act accordingly. We live beneath the divine gaze and listening to God in those circumstances is essential. As the psalmist reminds us, everything is in those hands and lasting blessings are found there and nowhere else. But remaining faithful is always a challenge.

Which are the voices to which we listen and respond?

As we journey through life, we are exposed to multiple voices engaged in an endless battle to gain the loyalty of our thoughts and actions. We are inevitably left with the challenge of discerning: which voice has authority to guide and govern our lives? Sometimes, when there is a high noise level around and within us this is no easy task.

Mark has been establishing Jesus as *The* voice of God, the only voice we need to hear as we search for life's meaning, our place in the universe, the way we need to be living, our relationship to others – all of the essential question for human living.

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In a world of diverse voices, we are being called upon to return to the one and only Voice that speaks the enduring Truth from God.

This does not come as a surprise to Christian readers as Mark has, from the outset, told us how Jesus is the Son of God. He is not simply a preacher. The implication is clear: the authority of Jesus to teach, to exorcise and to heal comes from the Spirit of God whose power is working through him. Ignoring the teachings of the Son of God (as found in Scripture and Tradition) is to ignore the will of God, replacing it with the expectations of the world around us, or with our own preferences.

Ironically, in this short narrative, the only one hearing God speaking through Jesus is the unclean spirit. In the Bible that word *hearing* means much more than just acknowledging the sounds of someone speaking. It includes responding to what is being said. Hearing and doing were different sides of the same reality. Listening to the words of Jesus in the synagogue that day does not mean the congregation was hearing the message coming to them from God.

But the unclean spirit does hear and what he is hearing fills him with fear. The fear is there in his voice as he reveals to readers the identity of this miracle working prophet.... *I know who you are, the Holy One of God.* He listened to what Jesus was saying and he heard in those words the fullness of the power and authority of heaven. He understood he was being evicted, that his time of ruining that man's life was finished. Someone stronger than him was now in control of human living.

Our God reigns – that is our source of hope and life

Mark's message here at the opening of his Gospel is now clear: Nothing; no one, no power is able to resist the transforming grace of the Living Word of God among us. At least for those who *hear* God speaking and acting in and through Jesus. This is the only voice able to resist and overcome the voices of darkness and false promises pervading the airwaves assaulting us. This image recorded by Mark is powerful – the forces of evil holding this man back from a fully human way of living in the world has come to an end through the authoritative Word of God's Son.

What is truth? I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life

We live in an environment in which we are accosted by a myriad of voices promoting alternative authorities to the Word of God. When it comes to matters of human sexuality, absolute truths, history, race, gender and many many more areas of life today, we are told it is "Man" who makes the rules. Heavenly authority was a delusion and the only reliable guide to what we are to do and how we are to act rests within us. It is only what we feel to be true that is true. We are thus released to act how we like; to do what we want and whatever we choose will be acceptable to God.

That is more the work of the demonic spirit who possessed the man in today's Gospel. Only the Word of God endures. Only the Word of God brings peace and brings alive for us the *milk and honey* with which God strives to feed us.

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