

## **Tuesday Reflection 11 January 2022**

Today is the 109th anniversary of my father's birth (he died over 30 years ago - RIP), so it is perhaps appropriate to reflect on the topic of authority.

In today's Gospel (Mark 1:21-28), we read that Jesus's teaching made a great impression on his listeners "because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority". Now there can be no doubt that the scribes and the pharisees assumed authority for themselves, so what is the difference between their authority and the authority exercised by Jesus? As we know, Jesus and John the Baptist were very scathing about the pharisees - 'brood of vipers' was one of the less flattering things John said about them (Luke 3:7) and Jesus charged the pharisees with hypocrisy "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:4).

There can be no question about Jesus's authority "even the wind and the waves obey him" but he uses his power to alleviate suffering while accepting suffering himself - and this is perhaps the nub of the issue. Jesus's authority is not of the kind that does not practise what it preaches (*pace* D. Cummings and B. Johnson); as we know from the temptations in the desert, he does not use his power for his own self-aggrandisement like those "who make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long" (Matthew 23:5).

Jesus exercises his authority in love, for the good of others: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). He exercises his authority in the furtherance of his kingdom - "follow me", and they followed. His authority is such that it is accepted - imagine you are a fisherman, who knows his trade; you have toiled all night without catching a thing, and then along comes a carpenter who tries teaching you your job! But you do what he says, and are handsomely rewarded.

So where are we, where am I in all this?

How serious are we when we pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done"? Are we really willing to submit to God's authority as Jesus did - "who made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7), and if we are, what part are we prepared to play to ensure that "Thy kingdom come on earth"? This is a serious question, which we need to explore with each other as we journey on the synodal pathway.

**Michael Townson**