

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
“Experts”

Deacon Mark Kelly

Morning television, social media, billboards etc. All day, every day we are assaulted by “experts”, telling us how to live, what to value, who to exclude or include in our lives, how to focus on self-improvement or fulfilment or gratification. We are hemmed in by hard and fast rules, regulations and understandings which have little empathy for individuals and their circumstances. The Jews had no shortage of “experts” – interpreters of the law, scribes working for the priestly hierarchy of the temples – only too happy to tell ordinary people about the remote and austere God who has a dim view of them and their lives (we still encounter the same). So what makes Jesus so different?

Jesus brings a totally new message to them, not about a remote, future, manifestation, but of God already present with and around them, connected with the messy reality of their lives as Father and defender, healer, friend of life, forgiving and upholding their dignity as their society did not do. Feeling God’s quiet saving presence, his audience recognise Jesus as “teaching with authority”.

“The sick, and those tormented by evil spirits, could feel in their own flesh the healing presence of God as a friend of life. The beggars and dispossessed, victims of all sorts of abuses, were sensing God as their defender and Father. Sinners, prostitutes, and undesirables felt accepted. Even women began to feel a new, hitherto unknown dignity. With Jesus, everything was changing”. (Pagola, J. Jesus-An Historical Approximation p233)

Familiar old criticisms and discourses would have put them to sleep in the pews but Jesus’ teaching made an impression because it began, not with hoary old formulaic lectures, but with empathy and understanding and hope that God is on their side, all loving and all understanding. No wonder Jesus’ “Good News” in the synagogue at Capernaum is met with joyful enthusiasm! (*Mark 1:21-28*).