

Sermon for the Festival of St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor January 26, 2025 jj
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The people were amazed at what Jesus could do, and all He was using was mere words! His teaching in the synagogue, something that was normally a boring, everyday occurrence, was all of a sudden an astonishing event. They said over and over again, His Word has authority! Just by speaking a few words, this Teacher wields the power to yank evil spirits out of people and banish them forever. We have never seen the likes of this before!

While that may be true, your ancestors have seen it. For the same God who was exercising His authority before their very eyes in the flesh, has also done great wonders in the past for the sake of His beloved people, allowing them to see from the very beginning of time that God's Word has ultimate authority.

Notice in our first reading about young Jeremiah wincing at the prospect of public speaking to his fellow Israelites on the verge of being exiled in punishment for their idolatry. He al-eady knows how evil these people are, and how so-not-in-the-mood they are about having their sins pointed out to them and told they are wrong! "I don't know how to speak!" Jeremiah complains, "I am only a child." But the Lord responds, "I am with you to deliver you. Whatever I give you to speak, you shall speak." Jeremiah doesn't need to unlock the secrets of persuading people to buy a product or adopt a different life-philosophy. He has been given the authority straight from God the Father Almighty to uproot whole kingdoms and plant new ones. Solomon had once written that there was a time when God chooses to gather stones and a time to scatter those stones, a time for war, and a time for peace, a time to uproot and a time to plant. But according to what Jeremiah is hearing, probably to his utter shock and amazement, God says- I'm putting you in charge of wielding my ultimate authority over

all nations! And all you have to do is repeat My Words.

What are these mighty Words of God's authority? Just as the term implies, authority is the evidence of our Lord's author-ship, the proof of His absolute right to claim the title of Maker of heaven and earth as His sole due. When Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on the top of Mount Sinai over eight centuries before Jeremiah lived, he wrote them down actually as Ten Words. That was the term he used. The First Commandment, as we say from the Catechism, is "You shall have no other Gods." But as you look up the original in Exodus 20, you see there's more to it- "I AM the Lord Your God, I am the One who saved you and brought you out of Egypt with mighty power. I AM Your God, I am the Only True God, therefore... You shall have no other Gods—in fact, get the gods you think you have out of my face!" Starting with that great first Word, a Word that establishes God's own revealed identity as the Lord, Yahweh, the One whose Existence depends on no one, that first Word establishes His authority over all things He created plus He reveals His great act of salvation, His miraculous rescue of an entire nation walking out of another- think the entire city of Paris picking up all together and walking en masse to Germany. With that great first Commandment and with each of the others that fol-low, God is for sure laying down the rules for you and me to follow, to remind you He is God and you are not, to threaten you with punishment if you break any of these Commandments by thought, word or deed. That is all true.

And yet, the entire Law of God, even the Ten Commandments specifically, do more than prescribe and command. They also offer us a striking revelation of who God is in Himself.

They provide a window into how God wields His power and authority not for Himself, but for you, for your benefit, without any merit or worthiness that could have been ever found in you.

In relationship to other parts of the Catechism, the Ten Commandments open your eyes to the life Jesus has won for you when He died on the cross and rose from the dead for your sake. They describe the life of the baptized children of the heavenly Father who have been remade in the image of God. Armed with your baptismal inheritance, the Ten Commandments now inform you- this is what Jesus is going to do as He lives His life of love for the world through your love of God and your neighbor. As Jesus was perfectly keeping the Ten Commandments, He was blazing the trail that He bids us follow Him as disciples who use the very same authoritative words Jeremiah-style to make other disciples out of all the nations merely by teaching and telling about Jesus.

The most sublime way the Commandments, the Ten Words, speak about who God really is, is found in how they picture for us the perfect love of God. Saint Paul wrote the “Love chapter” of First Corinthians 13 not merely so we have a perfect Bible reading for weddings, but really in order that we understand truly why God gave us Commandments, why the Father revealed His eternal love for us in Jesus Christ His Son, why both the Father and the Son have sent us the Holy Spirit to kindle our hearts with a Divine fire of love for God and love for one another, a love that rejoices in the truth, rather than using the truth as a way to exalt yourself at the expense of another.

Sure enough, God gives, or probably more accurate, He lends His authority in different measures to different people. A pastor has different authority to preach than a baptized hearer does, even though both speak God’s truth to other people. A president has different authority than a trash collector, even though one

may at times dress up as the other out of respect for their vocation! You and I, and this is something we share with the Christians in Corinth to whom Paul is writing to correct them, we at times desire to use God’s authority that He has lent to us as a way to gain our own advantage. That’s the way we tend to regard authority—we emphasize the differences of gifts of God’s authority, and try to capitalize on those differences as a way of exerting power over others for our benefit.

But the true power behind God’s authority, which we see plainly in the Law, is found completely in the Love that the Father showed to us in sending Jesus. Once we see Jesus, we understand why the All-powerful God is patient and kind, not envious or boastful, not keeping record of our wrongs, because Jesus answered for all our wrongs and wiped our record clean on the cross. We have at one time or another delighted in evil in our own specific ways, but Jesus along with speaking to us the Word of our forgiveness, has with that Word cast out that evil, just as authoritatively as He cast out the demons that shrieked their confession, You are the Son of God! Or the fever that afflicted Peter’s mother-in-law, it too must yield before the authority of our magnificent Creator, now walking with us in our human flesh.

Before you were formed in your mother’s womb, the Lord knew you. He gave you your body as it was being formed in His beautiful, unique orchestration. He knew the curse that sin has afflicted on this world would do its worst to tear that body down, but nevertheless, your body is still precious to your Savior who shed His human blood to rescue you, body and soul. It is His mysterious pleasure to inhabit you with His Holy Spirit, as you go through your life on a journey with Jesus, blessing others with the blessing that God is using you to give others, even if you are not aware of it at the time or think you have nothing useful to offer—you’re right! But it is not you alone anymore, it is Jesus working in you, and so the Commandments that

so often remind you of your mistakes and self-centeredness, that condemn you as a sinner, those same powerful Words open up for you the true nature of how much Jesus loved you to death, and He continues to love you, forgive you and give you His everlasting life. That power amazed the crowds who watched Jesus work. You will be amazed too, when you finally see all that He has done with you.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.