

Homily, 4th Sunday of Ordinary Time "B"  
Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul  
January 28 -29, 2012  
Rev. Noah J. Casey

Every time we walk through the doors of this Cathedral, we leave behind the time told on our watches, and we enter into sacred time, a time that has no beginning nor end. In other words, sacred time is God's time. We also enter into sacred space in order to become sacred. We will take that sacred time and space with us in our very persons when we leave here and return to the world with Jesus as our sacred companion.

This was Jesus' own experience when, as we heard in today's Gospel, he returned to His home synagogue in Capernaum. He entered sacred space at a sacred time to do sacred things: to proclaim the Scriptures, to teach and to heal. He does this for us as well each time we enter this holy place and become holy as He is holy.

Jesus also enters a place of potential conflict, and sure enough the conflict begins with His usual adversaries, the scribes. The scribes were experts in the Jewish law. The observance of the law came before all else. The law had its boundaries as does any law. In particular they were very concerned about laws regarding purity. In Jesus' day, just to be in the same space with a sick person, or a person who had some unidentifiable disease not only was unclean but made everyone else unclean. The result of all this was a kind of planned avoidance. The way to deal with these situations was simply to avoid those who were sick, and leave them alienated from everyone else. It was the standard teaching and theology of the day.

Then along comes Jesus. He has a different approach. His approach is not just about breaking laws and plowing through legal

boundaries. It's a new kind of theology that sees the possibilities of wholeness and healing for His brothers and sisters. The goal is inclusion rather than exclusion. The intention is for restoration to health and a return to the community. Healing brings wholeness. This is Jesus' intention. It is the manifestation of his compassion and tender care for others.

This approach is so different from that of the standard scribes and Pharisees, that the people recognize his action as a new kind of authority, one that is at the service of others. Of particular interest is that even the evil spirits recognize Jesus. They call Him by name, and see Him as the "holy one of God." He scares them. Once they were safe hiding behind the exclusion they felt from the officials. For the evil spirit, to be left alone and avoided was great! Now, in Jesus' approach, he seeks them out, and wants to cast them out by reaching out His healing touch to those in need. Jesus is not interested in avoiding impurity; He wants to heal impurity.

Each of us creates boundaries for many different reasons. Boundaries can be very helpful. Respecting another persons space, belongings, time are important ways of observing good boundaries. However, we sometimes can create unhelpful boundaries not only between ourselves and others, but within our selves. Internal boundaries might be established by fear of rejection, or clinging to past hurts. Fear itself becomes a boundary that blocks the love of others and even the healing power of Christ. Those fears keep us from coming to Confession. Those fears keep us from seeking the powerful, healing touch of Christ in the sacraments and prayer. He wants our healing, our wholeness. But we must ask ourselves, do we want this for ourselves as much as Christ wants it for us? Like Moses in the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy,

God has raised up a new prophet, His own Son, with power to save. Will we accept Him?

Boundaries are only good if they promote life, respect and compassion. Boundaries designed to alienate and avoid are not helpful. In this liturgy, as always, we pray for Jesus, as He did in His home synagogue at Capernaum, to break through our barriers of resistance, and bring to us the healing power of his love. In a few moments, for those who have a particular need of healing, we will celebrate the Sacrament of Anointing as we do on the fifth weekend of a month. If you desire this healing in mind, body or spirit, open your hearts and let the Lord of healing enter.

In the words of the Psalm response, "If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts."