

One of my guilty pleasures is binge watching old TV shows  
And one of the favorites is the original Law and Order...  
It ran for twenty years... 458 episodes...  
If you watched six episodes every day...  
it would still take two and a half months to watch them all!

In Season 15, former Chicago cop, Dennis Farina  
played detective Joe Fontana  
In one scene, he asked a receptionist for information about a suspect.  
She said *no way*...  
So he flashed his badge and said... *It's ok... We're authorized...*  
Later on... a whole pile of evidence was thrown out  
Because he *wasn't* authorized...

Just because someone *claims* authority  
Doesn't mean they actually *have* authority...

In the Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy, God warned...  
*Any prophet who fakes it,  
who claims to speak in my name  
something I haven't commanded him to say,  
or speaks in the name of other gods,  
that prophet must die.*

Just because someone *says* they're authorized...  
Doesn't mean they actually are.

In last week's Old Testament lesson...  
The Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh to tell the people  
*God is going to destroy this place in forty days.*  
And they believed him... they repented... and the city was saved...  
Jonah spoke with *authority... authority of God!*

In today's epistle... Paul was asked...

***Can we eat meat that was sacrificed to a false God?***

Paul explained ***with authority***...

***Baal is not God... and has no standing...***

***There is only one God...***

***sacrificing to something that doesn't exist cannot defile you***

And in today's gospel reading

Jesus entered the synagogue and taught.

The people were astounded by his words

he taught them as one having ***authority***... ***not*** like the scribes.

You see... just like detective Fontana... Scribes claimed their authority based on their knowledge... their class... their privilege...

God didn't authorize them. They just took it...

But when Jesus met the man with the unclean spirit

And cried out... ***Jesus is the Holy One of God!***

Jesus calmly said... ***Be silent! Leave this man!***

And immediately... the spirit fled...

The witnesses were stunned!

This ***Jesus***... speaks with ***authority!***

They were ***amazed... twice!***

First by his ***authority***... as a teacher!

Then ***second***... by his ***authority over spirits***

Who else could have done it?

Only ***God***...

In today's collect I prayed...

***Almighty and everlasting God,  
you govern all things both in heaven and on earth:***

Affirming the authority and power of Almighty God...

But if we say the words... without ***meaning*** them... ***believing*** them...  
We separate ourselves from God... by ***denying*** God's authority...

When we proclaim...

***God governs all things both in heaven and on earth***

We'd better mean it! Because the consequences are significant!

Knowing what we know... about the nature of God...

I'm astounded by people who insist

that everything they see and hear and feel and taste and smell

is under ***no authority*** what so ever

Seeing life like a rudderless ship, completely without order

random things, woven together... through haphazard coincidence

Formation of human beings

from a few pounds of chemicals and several gallons of water

Just happens!

and because so much of life runs on auto pilot...

breathing, heartbeat, blinking

without any conscious thought at all

people take it all for granted...

claiming life is an expectation... not a privilege authorized by God...

Everything we see, hear, feel, taste and smell

All of it... Is so ridiculously amazing...

Yet... so easy to take it for granted...

I remember driving up the Pacific coast highway in California

A narrow strip of cliff side roads

I was absolutely blown away by those incredible vistas

one after the other... and after an hour or so... It all became normal

Coming off a spectacular hairpin curve... another breathtaking view...

***Can we get something to eat along here somewhere?***

***numb*** to those magnificent views.

I heard about a guy who visited the Grand Canyon

walked up to the edge and said...

***Wow. What a big hole. Can we go now?***

God's magnificent creation... Taken for granted...

And by dismissing evidence of God...

we get dangerously close to believing

***We have the authority***

***We are in control***

Years ago, there was popular bumper sticker

***God is my co-pilot***

Fortunately, it was followed up by ***another*** bumper sticker

***If God is your co-pilot... You're in the wrong seat.***

You may ***think*** you're in the driver's seat...

But come on now... Under whose authority?

There's a popular country song...

About a woman running low on faith and gasoline

Who hits a patch of black ice on the road

As her car spins out of control she cries out...

***Jesus Take the Wheel***

***Take it from my hands***

***Cause I can't do this on my own***

***I'm letting go***

***So give me one more chance***

***Save me from this road I'm on***

***Jesus take the wheel***

Surrender your authority?

Authority you never really had?

Like a father holding his child in the air

***Look dad... I'm flying!***

No. You're not... Your Father is holding you... and he never lets go...

We may think we're doing it...

But no one can live without God

The ultimate authority over everything

Who provides everything

Who never leaves us

The only one... with real authority...

who was there... when the universe was created...

When every grain of sand, every drop of water, every molecule in the air

every animal, vegetable and mineral...

everything that breathes... and everything that doesn't

everything

was there... because he did it all...

And when Jesus... stood in that synagogue  
And taught with authority  
Not like the scribes  
With all their academic prowess and sanctified practices  
Jesus taught with the *authority*... of **God**...  
*because Jesus is God*

And they were *astonished... astounded... awestruck...*

Jesus... This Son of God... came to earth...  
And lived among us

Offered *everyone*  
His greatest skeptics... his nasty critics...  
Jesus offered them all... His grace... and his peace.

A peace which cannot be explained  
A peace which cannot be controlled  
A peace which is given freely  
To anyone who will simply receive it.

Our lives may not be how we want them right now  
Uncertainty... Insecurity... Inconsistencies...

But in the midst of our personal angst...  
We have choices to make.

Will I accept the authority of the Lord God?  
Will I follow his beloved Son, Jesus?  
Will I trust his grace and love to get me through tough days?  
Will I accept His authority, and find peace and joy?

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

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I pray we may all make the right choice... Right now...