



In this week's Gospel (Mk 1:21-28), Jesus with his disciples enters Capernaum and causes quite a stir. The scriptures say the people were "astonished" and "amazed" at Jesus' presence for two reasons: 1) "He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes," and 2) "He commands unclean spirits and they obey him." These two amazing and astonishing characteristics of the ministry of Jesus have not disappeared from the face of the earth; rather, they have been extended throughout history precisely through the instrumentality of the Holy Catholic Church which Jesus founded for this purpose. Our Catechism teaches us:

Jesus' words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished. The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries" (St. Leo the Great). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1115.

I recall in 1987, as an anti-Catholic Christian, being confronted with the claims of the Catholic Church. Initially I was anything but astonished and amazed; however, as I explored the

teachings of Catholicism and began to realize from Scripture and history that they may in fact be true, astonishment and amazement began to creep over my soul . . . could it be true? Is the Pope really the successor of St. Peter entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom of God? Does the teaching of the Church really have the same infallible character as the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles? Is the Mass really instituted by Jesus Himself as a Sacrament wherein the Sacrifice of Christ is made present to me today and I can receive our Lord – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – to be united with God's Divine Son in my body, blood, and soul? Did Jesus really offer His own holy mother to me as He did to St. John at the foot of the Cross inviting me to take her into my home, share my life with her, and be the recipient of her motherly love and care? Can I really have access to the prayers and support of the greatest Christians who ever lived, the Saints, as though they were standing beside me ready to help? My friends, I could go on and on with a list of astonishing and amazing truths Jesus continues to provide us through His Holy Church, but in harmony with "the people" encountering Jesus in today's Gospel, I believe the most amazing and astonishing fact which serves as the foundation of all the rest, is the fact that the Catholic Church speaks with an authority unknown anywhere else in the world – the authority of God Himself.

Pope Benedict XVI summed it up well:

There needs to be a renewal of what you could call a curiosity about Christianity, the desire really to discover what it's all about ... [to overcome the] feeling of staleness, this feeling that we are already long familiar with this, to create curiosity about the richness hidden in Christianity, so that this richness is regarded, no longer as a matter of burdensome systems, but as a **living treasure** that it is worth knowing. (*Salt of the Earth*)

I pray that as we hear and contemplate the Gospel this week, we might somehow share in the astonishment and amazement of those fortunate souls who experienced the unearthly authority with which Jesus spoke. After all, we as Catholics have every reason and means to experience Jesus in the exact same way! The voice and presence of Jesus are not hidden in the annals of history; His Holy Catholic Church continues to convey His message and presence with the same unearthly authority! For those who have ears to hear, this is absolutely astonishing!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples