

Babe Ruth was the great home run hitter for the New York Yankees baseball team. During one particular at-bat, the umpire, Babe Pinelli, called Ruth out on strikes. There was a stunned silence in the stands. Ruth turned to Pinelli and said, "There are 40,000 people here who know that last one was a ball." Pinelli replied, "Maybe so, but mine is the only opinion that counts."

We live in a world of thousands of opinions. Whose opinion counts? Who has the authority that matters? There are experts in every field imaginable, some of whom say conflicting things. Who do we look to as our authority?

Is global warming threatening the planet? Or is it a hyped-up scare tactic to serve special interests groups? Who's the authority that really knows?

Should we compassionately take steps to provide health care for every American? Or would that increase our national debt to the point where it might cripple our future? Which is true? Who really knows?

These are important issues, and there are good arguments on both sides. Absolute certainty is difficult to arrive at, and nobody will know for sure who's correct until events have played themselves out over a period of years.

As they say, I don't really have a dog in this fight and I doubt I'm not at all needed in that conversation. If you are students, you're just trying to get through piles of homework and will worry about this later in life.

But we know that there are other times when the issues hit closer to home. They are personal. And we know that the course of action is entirely within our control. The outcome rests entirely on the decision we make. Who determines what I will decide, which direction I will go? Whose opinion do I listen to? Who becomes my authority?

When I have a difficult decision about how I will act during a stressful time in my life—and I have to decide how I will act—who do I listen to? Oprah? Dr. Phil? Dear Abby? My best friend? Whose opinion counts?

When I'm making decisions about my future career or how to handle a sticky situation at work—where do I get direction? Mentors? Magazine articles? Motivational seminars? Whose my authority? Who do I listen to? It is, of course, Jesus we can turn to for anything. He is found in our Sacraments and in those in our lives he reaches through to guide us.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus taught "with authority," that is, he was the author of what he said; it never became his habit to quote rabbis and other authors, as the scribes used to do. He himself was the source of his teaching

His is a teaching that not only informs, it inspires. It does not simply impart new knowledge, it gives a new perspective on life. Not coercion, but conscience; not an imposition, but an inspiration. He is “the way, the truth and the life.”

We not only turn to Jesus for personal decisions we make, but we turn to him because his teachings and authority made things happen. He cast out demons. In other words, he liberated people who were tormented and demented in every way. And by that same authority, he can do for us what he did for them.

In the scriptures, there is a paralyzed man or for us, perhaps a paralyzed heart that is afraid to love again; in the scriptures there are eyes that cannot physically see, or for us a mind plunged in total darkness of addiction. In the scriptures there are ears unable to hear or for us a heart deaf to the call of Christ.

All of us have some form of paralysis, some hint of blindness or deafness or something we might call a “demon or evil spirit” that needs casting out.

In our own personal lives, there’s a need to get rid of certain “demons” that may possess us. Evil of which detracts from our humanity. Evil in our life which can break down, or even destroy our relationships. Demons, which separate us from each other by building up walls of distrust.

The demon which is being cast out shouts, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." This may sound like a profession of faith, but how could it be? Instead it was a reflection of the belief that if you could name someone you had power over them.

This was the significance of Jesus' asking a particularly intractable demon, later on in Mark's gospel, "What is your name?" The answer came back, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” Then they are done for. Once we can recognize and name our demon, only then we can begin to have power over it.

Name it! That which degrades our humanity? Lust. Pornography. Hookups. That which takes life? Abortion. Our hurtful words. Belittling someone. Evil which possesses or separates us? Addiction. Hatred. Greed. An unwillingness to forgive or failure to see the good.

Name yours... These are all powers that would destroy our life and rob us of the freedom, dignity and purpose God has for us. And within them all lurks, of course, the evil one.

They can be like a storm out of control. We seem to be at their mercy, like a snowstorm in Richmond. Then comes that moment when the sun starts to shine. The storm is over and the snow that had paralyzed us begins to melt.

That is like the power of Jesus Christ in our life. Just as the snow gives way to the strength of the sun, so the powers that seem to dominate our life can recede before the power of the Risen Christ. In he, we will find our answers.

There are a lot of opinions around that promise us liberation but end up being false and shallow. The power and authority of Jesus Christ is the only power on earth that doesn't dominate us but really sets us free.

Whatever ever our questions, whatever the demons in our life, be it our past or present, what Jesus did for that man in the synagogue and for those onlookers who heard truth, he can do for us. He is the One Who has the power to cast out our demons, who seeks to enter our hearts and lives, who wants to make us faithful, whole and free.