

For many, the word “authority” is a turn-off. This is unfortunate. Perhaps they are confusing the word “authority” with “authoritarian” - which is really a corruption of the word “authority”. Authoritarian leaders or governments may exercise brute force - such as intimidation, torture, imprisonment, or even death - but they certainly do not exercise authority.

The case-in-point is vividly drawn in today's gospel. Here, Jesus is seen to act with authority, “not as the scribes”, who, by their slavish following of the letter of the law, pile up burdens upon people. The scribes and other religious leaders in the time of Jesus, in fact, forfeited their authority. Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrates what authority is: it is a liberating force which frees people from their compulsions, addictions, and false gods - all those forces that ultimately stunt our growth.

We all fall under authority in some manner or other: child to parent, pupil to teacher, citizen to legislator. Likewise, at various times in our lives we also exercise authority. If it is true authority then it will protect an individual's freedom, not inhibit it. More importantly, the right exercise of authority will nurture and encourage a person to grow to their potential. That is why good parenting is so important and why parents should not shy from exercising authority for the good of their child.

The word authority is derived from the Latin *augere* which means “to increase”, “to augment”, “to grow”. This is the nurturing role of authority: to foster growth, understanding, wisdom and care for one another. Jesus came to bring us life. The word “author” is related to “authority”. Authority, then, is meant to author life. As God is the author of life, God is thereby the origin and source of authority. Paradoxically, by submitting our lives to God, we are liberated. Living under God's authority allows us to grow to be our true selves. This is the very antithesis to tyranny.

***Peace and blessings,
Gerard***