

Jesus - Authority and Power

*Taken from the book of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j. "To be Like Jesus"
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Intent of this event.

- ✓ *To reflect on the concept and practice of authority as Jesus taught and practised it.*
- ✓ *To realize that "authority" and "power" are exclusively meant for the benefit of the inferiors, not for the good of the superiors.*
- ✓ *To discover the worldly, selfish and 'anti-Christian' attitudes which crept in our families, institutions, schools, churches, political parties in the exercise of authority*

Target audience

General public. All who hold any authority however small

INTRODUCTION

In the Practice of Authority, there are two Possible Stances

1st Stance: The Way of Jesus

Authority and power are meant only for the benefit of the inferiors

- This implies that authority for the superior is a responsibility not a 'privilege, rather a 'liability'.
- Authority is not given to him for his personal advantage.
- Authority is a trust, a duty, a loving service, a commission conferred on the superior to assist those under him.
- Superiors are answerable both to God and to their subjects in the discharge of their office.

2nd Stance: The World's Way

Authority, primarily, is a privilege, a gift to be enjoyed by the superior

- It confers on the superior privilege, prestige, honour, power, wealth, immunity, etc.
- Regretfully, in our world, most people in authority seem to hold this view.

Unfortunately, there is an ambiguous position among many good people in authority, who, though in theory agree with the first stance, in fact, consciously or unconsciously, practise the second one; namely, they use authority to their personal advantage.

FIRST PART

Gospel Study

What is Authority and What For

First Stance: Jesus' Understanding of Authority and its Practice

Attentively, read some of the Gospel quotes below and reflect:

- First: what is the concept Jesus had of authority and power?
- Second: How did he exercise it?

Lk 22:22-27	An argument about greatness.
Jn 13:4- 17	The Washing of the feet.
Mk 10:35-45	The request of the Sons of Zebedee.
Mk 9:33-37	Who is the greatest?
Mt 23: 1-12	Warnings of Jesus to those in power.
Mt 23: 13-28	Jesus rebukes and condemns the Scribes and Pharisees.
Mt 10:5-15	Jesus sends the 12 Apostles to preach with authority.
Lk 14: 7 -11	First places at the wedding feast.

In all these passages Jesus stresses the idea that authority and power are solely for service and the benefit of others, not for the superior.

Second Stance: the World's Way of wielding Authority

Attentively, read some of the Gospel quotes below and reflect:

- First: what is the concept the world and worldly people have of authority?
- How do they exercise it?
- To whose advantage?

Mt 2:1-8	Herod - Duping the Three Kings.
Mt 2:16	Herod - Killing the innocent children.
Mk 6:14-29	Herod - Murder of John the Baptist.
Mt 22:15-22	Pharisees - Trying to trap Jesus with the question of taxes.
Mk 11:27-33	Priests and Lawyers – Questioning the authority of Jesus.
Mt 23:1-36	Scribes and Pharisees - Exploitation and injustices done to others.
Mt 26:1-5	Chief Priests and Elders - Plotting the death of Jesus.
Mt 26:47-68	High Priest - Arrest and religious trial of Jesus.
Mt 27:1-50	Pilate and Soldiers - Civil trial, death sentence, flogging, crown of thorns, abuses, crucifixion, death.
Lk 11:37-54	Pharisees and Teachers of the Law - Their hypocrisy.
Lk 18:1-5	The Parable of the Unjust Judge.
Lk 23:1-23	Pilate, Herod, Chief Priests and Leaders of the people - They sentence Jesus to death.

In these passages we see that the 'powers-that-are' wield authority solely for their benefit, nay even for their perverse aims.

Points for Personal Reflection and Discussion

1. Is authority required in human society? How? Why?
2. What is meant by authority in human society?
3. According to Jesus, what are its characteristics? Describe.

4. Explain the meaning of the following sentences and whether you agree or disagree? How much? In what sense? Give reasons.
 - All authority comes from God.
 - Someone said: “Authority is a lesser evil”.
 - Others said: The voice of the superior is the voice of God. .In what sense?
 - Opposition to the superior’s command does not always imply opposition to the will of God.
 - In today’s world there is a crisis of ‘obedience’.
 - Also, and even more, today there is a crisis of ‘authority’.

5. Can you discover abuses of authority today, both in the civil as well as in the religious spheres? If so,
 - Mention some of them.
 - And their causes.
 - Their consequences.
 - And their remedies.

6. List the qualities of a “Jesus-like Superior”.
7. List the qualities of a “Jesus-like inferior”.
8. Should inferiors respect, honour and love their superiors? How? Why?
9. Have superiors a right to ‘demand respect and love from those under them? Why?
10. How can Superiors make themselves respected and loved?
11. Can you find a difference between ‘obeying’ and ‘respecting’ your superiors?
12. Is there any difference between obeying and honouring your superiors? Explain.
13. Can inferiors help their superiors to be ‘better’ and more efficient superiors? How?
14. Guess the difficulties a person has to face to be a good superior – especially today? Enumerate and explain.
15. How a superior should face the challenge of disobedience from his inferiors?

16. Explain the following sentences:
 - Inferiors should be ‘responsibly free’ and yet obedient. How?
 - There is a world of differences between ‘childish’ and ‘mature’ obedience.
 - The rejection of the superior’s command does not necessarily entail the rejection of the superior’s person.
 - Superiors should earn respect, no demand it.
 - Superiors should not feel depressed when they are not obeyed.
 - Sometimes, rarely however, one may have the ‘duty’ not to obey his superior’s command. Would that be disobedience? Explain.
 - Hidden compensations, unsatisfied needs, mistaken expectations and latent wants may be at the root of abuses of authority. Explain.

PART TWO

The Opposing Concepts of Authority – Reflections

“Jesus versus the World”

- Looking at the way authority is practised in the world we can easily see that often, it’s just the opposite of what Jesus taught us.
- The mindset of the world, as regards obedience and power, is conflicting with the one of Jesus.
- Below you will find into two opposite columns a list of the radical contrasting mindsets of Jesus and of the world in the matters of authority.
- Reflectively, go over this list and answer to yourself the questions placed at the foot of the frame below.

LIST OF ‘CONTRASTS’ ON AUTHORITY AND POWER

<u>According to the World</u> <u>Authority stresses</u>	<u>According to Jesus</u> <u>Authority stresses</u>
Accusing	Excusing
Aggressiveness	Assertiveness
Artificiality	Spontaneity
Commanding	Dialoguing
Comparing	Accepting
Competition	Understanding
Condemnation	Excusing
Criticism	Cooperation
Despising	Appreciation
Disregard	Respect
Distrust	Trust
Duplicity	Frankness
Enslaving	Freeing
Expediency	Propriety
Exploitation	Justice
Fear	Peace of mind
Forcing	Encouraging
Grabbing	Sharing
Gratification	Renunciation
Hatred	Love
Honour	Simplicity
Impatience	Patience

Individual	Community
Intolerance	Forbearance
Legality	Morality
No excuses	Allowances
No pity	Empathy
Not listening	Sympathetic listening
Power	Meekness
Preaching	Example
Prestige	Anonymity
Pride	Humility
Privilege	Obedience
Protocol	Casualness
Punishing	Forgiving
Punishments	Rewards
Rebuking	Advising
Rejection	Acceptance
Repression	Persuasion
Rescuing	Helping
Rights	Duties
Rudeness	Gentleness
Sanctions	Rewards
Secrecy	Openness
Selfishness	Unselfishness
Sophistication	Simplicity
Stinginess	Generosity
Superiority	Equality
Suppression	Liberty
Thanklessness	Gratefulness
Threats	Advice
To be served	To serve
Unbending	Compromise
Unconcern	Caring
Use of Power	Persuasion

Questions for Reflection

In one way or other – big or small – sometime in life, all of us have held authority and been superiors to others: for example

- To our children.
- To our younger brothers and sisters.
- To our pupils.
- To our employees.
- To our servants.
- To our team-mates.
- To our classmates.
- To our office colleagues. Etc.

1. Have you been a good superior to them?
2. Have you treated your subordinates as Jesus would?
3. Go over again the list of opposing contrasts. Keeping them in mind, try to ascertain how did you exercise authority?
4. When in authority, what things did you stress more?
5. All in all, in your exercising authority, towards what side of the frames did you lean? Towards the way of world or towards the way of Jesus?
6. Does this reflection tell you something about your attitudes and values in the exercise of authority?
7. You may put down in writing your reflections and insights.

Points for Prayer

- Ask Jesus to help you to practise authority as he did.
- Read one at a time, the principles or maxims Jesus gave us in his Gospel about authority quoted below.

Reflect and pray on each of them

- I came to serve, not to be served.
- Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.
- If you want to be the master become a slave.
- If I, your Master, washed your feet, you too ought to wash each other's feet.
- I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.
- It is better to give than to receive.
- When you are invited to a feast, take the last seat.
- He who makes himself like a little child, will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- I am among you as one who serves.

APPENDIX AESOPUS' Fable for Superiors.

THE LITTLE CRAB AND HIS MOTHER

Example is the best command.

Mother Crab kept shouting and upbraiding her son: "Can you not walk straight, my son, like other children do?"

At last, already tired of it, the little Crab replied: "Mum. Kindly, first, show me how you do it that I may learn from you?"