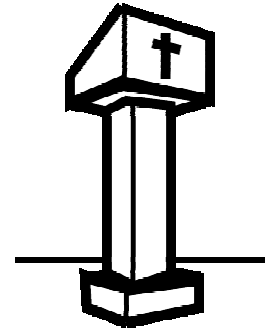


**Sermon Synopsis**  
**The Fifteenth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Preached by Fr. Peter Champion**



Many of you know that before I went to seminary, I worked as a restaurant manager. My last five years, I managed a three star dining room called The Carvery at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

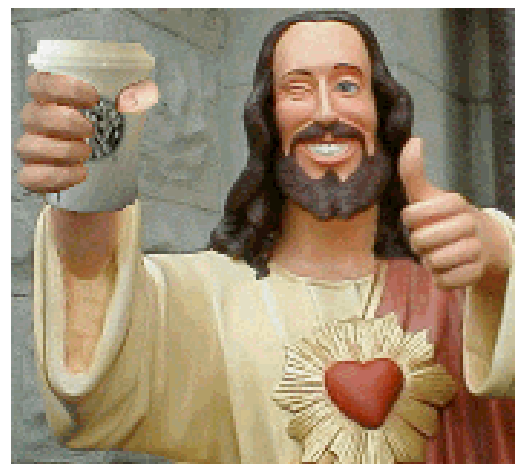
I became used to sales people showing up and pitching their products. Some were things I might use in a fine dining room, but many weren't. One day in 1982 or 83, a saleswoman came in and said, "We think you should sell espresso in your bar and restaurant." She brought a counter top machine in, set it up and made us samples; my boss Randy, who'd never tried espresso, had about 6 shots and ended up totally wired!

We decided we wanted to try the idea. But because we were a corporate restaurant, we had to get corporate's permission to deviate from the standard menu offerings. I sent off a request, and while we were waiting we put it on our menu. We were selling the heck out of it when word came back from corporate.

"We have an exclusive contract with Yuban," I was told. "And we're convinced that espresso has no future. Only old Italian men who spend hours sitting and talking will drink it. So, the answer is no." I marshaled my sales figures and my best arguments, but to no avail. Finally, just as the corporate folks were hanging up the phone, I said, "Wait one more minute, I have to tell about this place up here called Starbucks..." So we pulled the machine for a few weeks to let the storm die down. Then we quietly went back to selling espresso, doing very well with it.

By the way, when I was back at SeaTac airport last month, I saw about 15 Starbucks stalls in the terminal. Almost nothing is sweeter than that sense of being right in the face of corporate power.

The point of my telling this story is that it shows a difference between power and authority, which is a distinction important to the story in this morning's Gospel reading. Jesus is teaching in the temple in Jerusalem, and that statement implies that Jesus had listeners. The chief priests and leaders complained to him and asked him to tell them by what



authority he taught in their temple, and who had given him that authority. The chief priests and leaders were the powers that be, and they were jealous of their power. They claimed for themselves the right to determine who had authority to teach in the temple. And apparently Jesus wasn't on their short list.

In the same way, my corporate overlords had power to decide what would go on the menu and what wouldn't, and they weren't shy about exercising it. In their minds, apparently people in Seattle knew nothing about coffee.

I was taught that, in-group dynamics, power is something people claim for themselves. Authority, on the other hand, is something conferred on someone by others. A clear statement of this can be found in the Declaration of Independence, which states that "governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,"

Here my story also helps understand the difference. While the corporate honchos had power, and thought they had the authority, they really didn't get it. Their experience in L.A. just didn't give them the wisdom to understand what was happening with coffee up in the great northwest. Nor did they understand what was about to happen with espresso. It's not just for old Italian men anymore.

It seems that, in our Gospel, the chief priests and leaders have power, and historic authority. But the story makes clear that they are misusing their authority, and that Jesus indeed has authority granted not by humans, but by God. And the Jesus we meet in the Bible is an authority figure who carries his power lightly.

Paul's words from our reading in Philippians are a declaration of Jesus' ultimate power and authority. Paul wrote that Jesus, **"though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."**

What Jesus modeled, and what Paul described, is humble leadership which derives authority from God and uses power in accord with God's purposes. This is the model that we, as followers of Jesus, are called to emulate.

Think for a moment of those who have power in your life. Bosses, the government, police, 'she who must be obeyed.' And think about the places in your life where you wield some power. Are they, and you, using your power humbly and in accord with God's purposes? That isn't the model we see many powerful people in our society following, is it? Far too often, people use power to stoke their egos or feather their nests at the expense of others. It was Henry Kissinger who said that power is often the ultimate aphrodisiac.

Next, think about those people who are people of authority in your life. Some have authority on the basis of their positions, and some also have authority and power—doctors, judges, teachers, for example. But often the folks we turn to

when we need wisdom and guidance are not people of temporal power. They may be wise friends, parents, grandparents, or even neighbors or work associates. And finally, think about those for whom you are a person of authority. Who are they? Children, grandchildren, students, or perhaps others. Do you recognize that your authority is conferred, or do you claim it as your right?

Of course, power and authority are often intertwined in complex ways. As your priest, I have certain powers by virtue of my ordination and my position as rector of St. John's. I try to use them as Jesus would, but I sometimes fall short. And many of you generously confer some spiritual authority on me and share your greatest joys and deepest struggles with me. For those, I am deeply grateful. I seek to be a trustworthy steward of that authority. But again, I sometimes fall short.

To bring this to a close, I remind you once more of my espresso experience. Power and authority are too often used promiscuously and for personal aggrandizement or gain. But we are called to live a different way—humbly, gratefully, using both our power and authority as Jesus did.