

"Hoopla! Hoopla!" they all cried out!

A politician was visiting an Indian reservation and addressed a group of Indians in a ranch corral. After many of his promises to them, they would respond with a loud "Hoopla! Hoopla!":

The politician was very pleased with their enthusiasm. At the end of his speech, the Chief escorted him out of the corral, and said to him:

"Be careful Senator!

Don't step in the hoopla!"

Today is Super Bowl Sunday which could be called Hoopla Sunday due to all of the hype, bombast, and promotion that precedes it, and due to the fact that the game itself seldom lives up to the hype.

And this year, we have the deflated ball scandal where it is alleged that the Patriots doctored the football in their most recent game.

Was the football authentic?

That is the question.

And that is the question that arises in the minds of the people who gather around Jesus in today's Gospel.

Is Jesus for real?

After all, he is a hometown boy. And we find it difficult to discover our neighbor to be special.

So the people were amazed and asked among themselves:

"What is this?

"A new teaching with AUTHORITY!

HE COMMANDS EVEN THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS AND THEY OBEY HIM!"

The words "author," "authority," and "authentic" all denote what is real.

So many teachers through the ages have arisen only later to be debunked as frauds. Yet the teachings of Jesus and his persona have withstood the test of time.

False teachers bring in their wake ignorance and darkness into the minds of their followers.

That is why the prophecy of Isaiah quoted by Matthew precedes today's Gospel:

"The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light;

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on those sitting in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen." MT 4:16

And so we pray:

O God help us to seek what is real.

And help us to be authentic in our dealings with one another.

A light shines in our darkness.

Let it cast away phoniness, deceit, and fraud.

For to walk with Christ

is to wlk in the light of truth.

Amen