

4th Sunday of the Year/B

Be quiet! Come out of him!

In our Sunday Gospels this year will be listening to the Gospel of Mark, and today's Gospel is taken from Chapter 1. Jesus is at the beginning of his public ministry, and he goes into the synagogue in Capernaum and begins to teach.

We hear that there was a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Other translations say, 'he had an unclean spirit', which I think is better. The word 'possessed' can conjure up images of demonic possession as we saw portrayed in the film, "The Exorcist" many years ago.

What was the unclean spirit in this man? Well, of course we don't know. But we can speculate.

- Perhaps the unclean spirit was a love of riches; perhaps his life was dominated by the pursuit of wealth and possessions.
- Perhaps it was a spirit of injustice; maybe he treated his workers unfairly.
- Perhaps it was a spirit of superiority that led him to seek the place of honour at functions, to be considered better than other people.

One suspects that in many ways he would have been an ordinary, indeed respected, member of the synagogue community. Week after week he attended the synagogue services and the unclean spirit within him was never disturbed. He was able to leave the synagogue and continue his life as before.

Then one day Jesus came and spoke in the synagogue, and for the first time the man became disturbed; he started to feel uncomfortable, threatened.

Because there was something about Jesus' teaching that was different – “he spoke with authority.” Jesus talked about God in a way that you felt he knew God, that he was a prophet and that the word he spoke was the very word of God!

Suddenly the evil spirit in the man felt threatened. It knew that Jesus was the Holy One of God, that Jesus could destroy him, that the power of God is always stronger than the power of evil. And that is what happened.

Jesus said sharply, ‘be quiet, come out of him.’ The unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry came out of him. The people were amazed. Here is a teaching that is new, they said, and with authority behind it. He gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him. And his reputation spread everywhere through all the surrounding countryside.

As we reflect on this episode, we realise that the man with the unclean spirit is me and it is you. We are all good people, yes, but that does not mean that we don't harbour within ourselves, sometimes at least, some spirits that are unclean, that are not of God. Perhaps we harbour a spirit of resentment, of envy, of superiority, of injustice, or whatever. It has found a home in us, and we are happy to accommodate it. Indeed, we can go to Mass, say our prayers, etc., and the spirit is never disturbed – at least not too greatly.

So let us in this Mass have the courage to beg the Lord to come to disturb us. May he enter the synagogue of our lives, the sacred place in the depths of our being and expel all that is not of God. May he lavish his fragrance upon us and touch us with his love.

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