

Gospel Verse
Sunday, February 8, 2009
(8:30 AM Mass)

The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

■ **Mk. 1:33-34**

“And he went out preaching and driving out demons through the whole of Galilee.” Poor Job certainly could use his help right now because he is demon-possessed. “I shall never see happiness again.” He is overwhelmed. He is oppressed. He is convinced that this world is useless because his life situation is horrendous. He is what we would call today ‘possessed’. I want to look at this whole language because it’s such a foreign language to us about demonic possession and demons and do they exist. We don’t even want to talk about it because that’s not very sophisticated. That’s not the way we talk today.

But they had to talk that way in those days because they were trying to describe a reality to which they have no concepts – no conceptual language. It’s a rather new thing. We talk about God in conceptual terms. We talk about the Almighty, the transcendent, the divine. Those are conceptual terms. And the only way the ancients were able to talk about something like that were in concrete terms. And so they talked about God in terms of personification. Like a person that you can see and touch. So we have God walking through the garden and God is sunning himself and God is doing all kinds of different things as a man would do. Although we know that God is not a man, but we can conceptually see it. The same way with the states that we find ourselves in. And that is the state of oppression. Oppression again is a conceptual term. Or the states of elation and joy. Those are conceptual terms too. So when we personify it, that’s what the ancients always did, when we talked about oppression, we talked about demons.

When we think of demons, we think of little devils with red tails and pitch forks. That’s a personification. It’s not necessarily helpful, but it’s the way that we think. When we think of angels, we think of these little things with wings who are watching over us and whispering in our ears telling us good things to do because they are messengers of God. That’s a personification.

What we need to do is somehow understand that both of these personifications, angels and demons, are trying to describe a reality. And it’s not just a reality that took place in Jesus’ time, it’s a reality that takes place in our time as well. And he seems to be spending a lot of time casting out demons. And we don’t do a whole lot of that today. We don’t do a whole lot of casting out demons. And I think, somehow, we probably should.

Now, I’m not talking about the Exorcist. Every time I baptize a baby and I throw a little water on them I say, ‘Well, it didn’t steam. They are fine’. (laughter) We’re not talking about that kind of radical, satanic, demonic possession. The church acknowledges that it’s so very rare. However, everybody’s bothered by demons. And so when Jesus is casting out demons and what he’s doing 2,000 years ago, we still have to do today.

So we found him last week going into the Synagogue and somebody was possessed by a demon. And the demon shouts out, ‘What do you want of us?’ It seems to be transpersonal. Something demonic in the air. A mystery of evil that we really can’t put our hand on, but we know it’s there. There’s a dark side to reality. Why is there so much evil in the world? It’s a mystery that we don’t understand. So we got to name it. And personify it. Call it a demon.

So this demon is shouting out, ‘We know who you are.’ The demons know Christ. Why? Because they’ve been in control and they are about to lose control. If there’s somebody oppressing a household and somebody stronger than them comes in, they are going to immediately recognize there’s a stronger spirit in there and they are going to go after it. So, the demons recognize Jesus. What does Jesus do? He says, ‘Quiet’. He muzzles the demons. ‘Come out of him.’ The last thing the demonic wants to do is get out.

Once the demonic gets in, it's almost impossible to get out. It clings. It's not going to go out gently. It's going to come out screaming and yelling and kicking and throwing convulsions or whatever it's going to do until it gets out.

We see Jesus clearly doing that and the question is, is it still going on today? Of course it's going on today. And what we can say about personal angels and personal demons we can also say about institutional angels and institutional demons as well because they are transpersonal. As a matter of fact, it's really from the institutions sometimes that really affects us personally. Our great institutions all have an angelic side and a demonic side. Our educational institution educates our kids; but the political part of it sometimes keeps our kids from getting educated. Our religious institutions, our government institutions, our economic institutions. Right now we are in the process of something demonic in our economic institution.

Our personal economic institution is what we call Capitalism. Free enterprise. We have discovered in the last 100 years or so that there's something angelic about it. The angel part of free enterprise is that it can create wealth. Like nothing else in the world, capitalism creates wealth like no other system in the world. The demonic side is the side that says there's never enough. It's the greed, the cheating, the lies.

The way that you finally deal with it, because it always hides itself (the demonic always wants to hide itself under respectability). It will make up the most respectable name in the world. And everything was hidden. And the way that you begin to deal with an institutional demon or even a personal demon is to expose it. To name it. We find that Jesus, whenever he's dealing with demonic, he says, 'What's your name?' It's greed.

So we name the greed. And we named the greed during the savings and loan crisis. And somebody said we got to make some laws so this never happens again – HA! What a joke. Here's the thing about evil – you don't kill it. You can't kill it. Evil has a thousand eyes. And the most dangerous thing about evil is that when you try to directly attack it it is so strong that you pick up its energy and you literally become what you hate.

If a child hates an abusive parent and hates that parent because he abuses her so badly, she's going to abuse her friends. When I was hearing confessions some girl said I had a big fight with my mother and I took it out on my girlfriends. Why? Because it's the same energy. So you can't directly attack evil. The only way to deal with evil is you got to sneak around and bite it on the butt because it's got a thousand eyes. And Jesus knew that. The greatest evil of all was his crucifixion. His death. Death was the greatest of all evils.

And you can't kill death. So he made it impotent. He transformed it so it had no more power. I believe that the last day of the universe, the last day of the world, it's still going to be around. But the trick is to transform it and make it toothless. How do you do that? By naming it. By muzzling it. By casting it out.

What is the oppression that you live under? What are our own personal demons? Everybody has a demon or two. What are our addictions? What are the things that no matter how much we have it's not enough, we're obsessed with it, we're compulsed with it and we can't let it go? Whether it's alcohol, sex or drugs or making more and more and more and it's never going to be enough. Whether it's a hurt...And the way demons get in, usually, is by a hurt. Little children have gentle, open, radical spirits. And the moment that spirit is violated...and most parents never set out to violate their children. I never met a parent who said, 'I'm going to be a lousy parent'. No, the wounded pass on their wounds.

The scriptures say the sins of the father are passed onto the third and fourth generation. But, the mercy of God is everlasting. So if we have been wounded, we pass on our wounds to our children. And the hurt gets in there. We become possessed with our resentment or our anger or our pain of betrayal. And once it gets in there it takes on a life of its own. It's really amazing, I can say something wonderful about you and you will forget it in about 3 minutes. I could say something negative about you and you're going to hold on to it and you're going to think about it and you're going to milk it and it's going to take you over – That's what we call Possession.

In one sense, all of us are possessed. That's the reason Jesus is spending a lot of time getting rid of these demons, this evil. He knows he's not going to destroy it. In the scripture, where He says 'Be quiet, come out', the Hebrew word is 'be muzzled' like you muzzle a dog. You quiet them and get it.

So how do you deal with the demonic? The first thing you do is recognize it. It always wants to hide and it always wants to hide under respectability. And one of the ways you can tell that you're hiding something is how much you rationalize. If you find yourself rationalizing everything, you're usually hiding something. So you take a really hard look at it. Sometimes other people have to point it out to you. Sometimes it's so close to us, our resentment, our anger, our bitterness is so deep inside of us, we can't see it. At that point you've got to have the humility to allow someone else to name it. It's got to be named.

But the greatest demon we are facing today is fear. We are a people so filled with fear. It's got to be named. I have always began the anointing of the sick with an exorcism. And the first demon that I exorcized is fear. Someone who's preparing for surgery and waiting for the surgery is wondering how is it going to go? What if it goes wrong? What if something's wrong? You think and think and think and it ties us up and we can't sleep or eat or function. You got to name it. You name it and then you cast it out in the name of Jesus Christ.

What we dare to believe is that He who is in you is more powerful than he who is in the world. He came to you at the moment of your conception. He was manifest in you at the moment of your baptism. He comes to you every time you receive Eucharist. He is in you. Now, the only cure for possession once it's named, once it's cast out, is another possession. We cast out that which is keeping us from being alive. And we allow ourselves to be possessed by the only one who can set us free. And that's our Lord Jesus.

When we are possessed by the Spirit of Christ, there's no room for the spirit of the evil one. That's the reason when Jesus says, If you cast out a demon and you clean the house, you'd better make sure you don't fall into the old trap. Your second state is going to be worst than your first state. So, if you're going to clean house, you got to let something in. That's exactly what St. Paul is talking about today. Paul's demon was being self-righteous and controlling and the follower of the law and better than everybody else and he was killing people in the name of God. In the name of God he was killing people. And when he finally saw it, he cast it out and then he became possessed with Jesus.

He came to the point at the end of his life where he said, 'I live no longer not I, but Christ lives in me'. I see through his eyes. I feel through his eyes. I am a member of his body. And of course his whole ministry he's trying to tell us it's all you. It's all you. Do you see it? Will you allow it? He uses the word 'en Cristo', in Christ, 164 times. That's the freedom. Those are the angels.

So we are constantly dealing with angels and demons. We're not medichists. That does not mean that they are not equal. Evil is a mystery we will never fully understand. And never fully comprehend yet no one can deny it. It's always here. But it is the work of Christ. And that's what he's beginning to do today and that's what he's going to do throughout his entire history. That's what he's still doing in the world today. Christ did not stop working 2,000 years ago.

Cast out the demons and proclaim the kingdom.