

### An Unclean Spirit in a Man Calls Out

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.”

Mark 1: 24

So what do you think? Is this man in the synagogue really possessed by the devil? Or not? Sometimes it seems to me that there were more people with evil spirits back then than now. Although I have had my share of run-ins with people who were mean-spirited, destructively envious, out of control because of some kind of substance abuse. There is evil at work in the world. I do not attribute every bad thing that people do or I do to the devil but I am not as naïve as I used to be either. There is evil afoot in our world and sometimes it touches my life—and yours.

That man in the synagogue had a knowledge that no others in that synagogue had. He KNEW that Jesus of Nazareth was the Holy One of God. That man was way ahead even of the apostles and the many disciples of the Lord. How did he know that? Evil power is spiritual power and spiritual power knows things that is why people are drawn to it. There are people in this parish who, over the years, have gone to séances, had their palms read, played with Ouija Boards and Tarot Cards, or who have gone to mediums. Some of you may have. I have family members who have. When I asked them they demurred as it was a lark and they didn't really believe in this stuff. And yet, then there have been others who most definitely did think that there was something there. And they were right. There most definitely is something there. But it is not a good something. And in every instance of anecdotes such as these it has always been women who participated. Men have plenty of other paths but this one seems to work better on women.

I don't dwell on the dark side of things but the dark side of things exists. It touches people on occasion. On several occasions over my 27 years here I have been in contact with the exorcist for the archdiocese. Not about full possessions but more about people who are experiencing things spiritually which are unwelcome and very uncomfortable. Sometimes my own prayer was not sufficient to the task. Sometimes it was. There was a woman who called to ask me to bless her house. Doors were opening and closing on their own. As were some drawers in certain rooms. I took counsel from a very holy priest I knew and he asked me to ask her to abjure Satan like we do when we renew our baptismal promises. Do you reject Satan? So I called her back to set a time to bless her home but then I asked her: Will you reject Satan and abjure his works? “I don't think I can do that.”

Just sit with that reply for a few seconds. “I don't think I can do that.” Meaning: No. I am not going to do that. Why for heaven's sake, would anyone ever do that? Because she was hooked on the power side of the evil power she had encountered. She didn't like the annoying side or the demanding side but she definitely was not ready to give up access to the power of the dark side. And make no mistake, there is some power on the dark side.

Everywhere you see human beings engaged in destructive actions you know that the evil one is nearby whether it be in your own family or in the community or in the world of business when you go to work or in the behind-the-scenes activity in the world of politics and espionage and IT.

So the readings for today have something to say to us. First, Moses makes a promise before he dies that God will send THE prophet whose word will be true and reliable. In the gospel Jesus of Nazareth drives out the demon and everyone is amazed at the power of his words and the authority and the power over evil. Ask yourself: Is the power of Jesus Christ greater than any and all the other powers at work in our world or in your own life? The question needs to be asked by you and by me.

Second, the psalm for today says: If today you hear his voice, harden not your heart. So. As you have heard me speaking for the last six or seven minutes what has been going on in your hearts? Have you been a little frightened? Have you crossed your arms on your chest and thought: “Yeah, good! Who believes in that kind of stuff today?” If that was your attitude do you think it could be considered as hardening your heart to what you are hearing? But isn’t that precisely what the psalmist counsels us not to do. Isn’t that attitude similar to the attitude of those who attended the séances or went to mediums? And if you were the evil one would you like to be able to go to work on those who don’t even think you exist let alone take you seriously?

Interesting quote. Saint Catherine of Siena tells us that we should do all in our power to welcome into our lives the Spirit of the Living God and to develop a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus by means of prayer and good works and sacrifices. Catherine said that the evil one who lives in the fire of hell has not taste for the fires of love and does not draw near. But if the soul is lukewarm or tepid or indecisive or doubtful—then the evil one sends his minions to ply their subtle but effective works of ugly thoughts, fears and compulsions.

The heart of our Catholic faith is about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He did battle with the power of the evil one and he unleashed the power of God which is the power of suffering and forgiving love. That battle was fought. The evil one thought he triumphed because he conspired with evil people to have Jesus put to death and to die in agony. But the Holy One of God did not stay in that tomb. There is something about him that cannot be destroyed snuffed out or defeated. Love is stronger than death. Now always and forever. The triumph has been won. The question remains: Will I put my faith in Jesus Christ and be part of his Body on earth, the Church? Or will I dillydally in the sidelines and hold back the full-hearted commitment that only I am capable of? Or only you are capable of. If today you hear his voice harden not your hearts. Has Our Lord spoken anything to you in the last ten minutes?