

Each Sunday and major feast day following the proclamation of the Scriptures and the homily we publicly proclaim the basic tenets of our Christian faith in the Nicene Creed or occasionally the Apostles Creed. Today’s Gospel proclaims the primitive Christian creed regarding Jesus, “the Holy One of God.” Where it originates is the real surprise! The words are spoken by a human person but originate from the devil! The devil is the first person in St. Mark’s Gospel to profess the truth regarding Jesus!! What is going on here?!!

St. Mark is setting up the primary conflict that will be the central axis of his account of the person, message and work of Jesus—the battle between the forces of evil, sin, darkness and death against the forces of love, forgiveness, light and life revealed in Jesus. The question posed in the gospel today by the devil is telling: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” Jesus’ rebuke of the devil and his subsequent freeing of him of his possession is the answer. Jesus has come to set free the evil that has, or continues, to hold us bound.

Today people suffer from any number and kind of “possessions” or evils. Not the kind portrayed in Hollywood movies such as the “Exorcist” of forty-some-years ago and its spin-offs television shows. No, like the man in the Gospel, the evils suffered by people today consume their lives—addictions to alcohol, opioids, other chemical substances, internet pornography, various forms of sexual addictions, greed, injustice in its many forms to mention just a few which ruin not only personal lives but also families, and in the case of the crime of sexual abuse committed by clergy or other church personnel, whole communities of faith. The “unclean spirit” Jesus casts out of the man in today’s gospel can also be the voice of evil that speaks within us: the voice of revenge, self-centeredness, self-righteousness, anger. It can also be the fear of letting go—our narrow attitudes, prejudices, perceptions of other people or groups of people as we’ve seen in the last few weeks in the arguments about immigrants played out in our nation’s government; the sins of our own past perhaps already forgiven but the memory of which we just can’t, or won’t, let go are also “unclean spirits” we all possess—or possess us that disable us from extending compassion and kindness; “unclean spirits” that scare us from making the moral and ethical

decision regarding matters of personal, family or societal morality. Like the possessed man in the gospel the evil within us does all in its power to keep us in its grip, and when confronted with Jesus howls out: “What do you want to do with us/me, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us/me?”

We need not be afraid. While Jesus has come to confront and defeat the evil that holds us bound, he has not come to destroy but save and redeem us. Notice, Jesus addresses and rebukes the evil spirit which has imprisoned the man in the gospel, not the poor man himself whom he treats with great tenderness and compassion as Pope Francis reminds and exemplifies for us: Mercy—love’s response to suffering. Even though the Year of Mercy has ended I continue to display the special banners we ordered for its observance to continue to remind all of us as the one currently displayed in the vestibule proclaims: “No one can be excluded from God’s mercy.” In the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance/Confession we are provided the means by which each of us can personally encounter and be encountered by Jesus and experience release from the evil that holds us bound. As always, I’m not concerned about how long it has been since you’re last celebration of the sacrament. Jesus and my joy are that you’ve come.

Experiencing the merciful authority of Jesus, we in turn, through our acts of compassion and generosity can speak with the voice of Jesus to drive out the unclean spirits that not only possess our minds and hearts but of those around us and live the life of the Kingdom of God Jesus has come to bring.

Each day the Church begins its daily prayer with a plea to open our hearts, minds and lives to the grace of God revealed in Jesus and experience release from the evil around and within us and so walk anew as the children of God. It is the refrain of today’s Responsorial Psalm: “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts.” May it be so.

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