

**Homily for the 4th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year B**  
**St. Peter's Sat 5:00pm/Sun 8:00/9:30am Masses - Jan 28, 2024**

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20** "One who does not heed his words, I myself will hold him accountable."

**Psalms 95:1-9** "Make a joyful noise to the Lord. Kneel before him. Do not harden your hearts."

**1 Corinthians 7:32-35** "I say this to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord."

**Mark 1:21-28** "He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him."

## **The Divine Exorcist**

### **Introduction**

We have a gospel reading about Jesus confronting a person possessed by a demon. This is something rare, although it is real. I read about someone who said he was too self possessed for that to happen, although I am pretty sure that's not a good thing either.

### **Deuteronomy**

Way back, through the prophets, God was in constant communication with the people: encouraging, comforting, but also warning against evil. Moses reminds the Israelites of when God kind of took the veil off at Mt. Sinai so the people could know him. But the people were used to gods who demanded fear, demanded child sacrifices. So even when God brought them out of slavery, they were afraid. Clearly this God was way more powerful than any they had worshipped in Egypt or heard about anywhere in the ancient world.

Moses was the only man who ever saw God's face and lived. He was the mediator between God and his people. They were even terrified by the light that came from Moses' face when he came down from the mountain from his meeting with God. Here is the essence of what God told Moses to say to the people: Look, I brought you out of slavery and made you a nation and am about to bring you into a land of your own. I told you what to do. I told you what not to do. I told you what would happen if you did

not do what I told you to do. I told you what would happen if you did what I told you not to do. I also reminded you over and over again that I did said and did all of these things because of my love for you.

But now you say to Moses, "We don't want to hear from God any more. We are afraid of him. We don't want any sign of his presence." Now here is what God is going to do. He will bring to you someone like me (Moses), but he will not just tell you the words that come from God. He will have my own authority. He will speak directly from me. In fact, he will BE my Word. He will BE the truth of God. He will have divine authority. His divine name is the Word of God. His human name would be Jesus, which means 'God's salvation'.

## **Mark**

This prophecy is one of three hundred times in the Old Testament where the Messiah is foretold with accurately. Our faith is not a fairy tale. It is the history of God's plan to make himself known and to share his own blessed life with us. Jesus IS that knowledge, that truth, that word. How can we be so sure of that?

First of all, it is historical. There is no one anywhere in the ancient world for whom there is more evidence that they lived than for Jesus of Nazareth. The famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, recently was confronted about his claim that historians are not convinced about the life of Jesus. Under questioning, he had to admit that he knows this not to be true. He lied. That's demonic. All historians acknowledge Jesus.

Mark was best friends with Peter, who was the Lord's best friend. He tells how Jesus' public ministry begins with confronting of the real enemy, not the Pharisees, but the devil. He encounters this enemy right in the heart of worship, the synagogue.

We do not hear what Jesus was teaching, but instead we hear about how the people reacted to that teaching. The synagogue is the place where the

Jews meet to hear the Scriptures, to read and to pray. The scribes taught about what is written in the law of Moses and the prophets. But Jesus spoke to them as the Lord of Moses and the God of the law itself. This is not just Jesus versus the unclean spirit. It is the power of God versus the powers of evil. Authority in this case is that Jesus taught out of his being rather than by quoting sources. He has the right to teach as he does.

How seriously do we take the authority of Jesus? The evil spirits know Jesus because he had overcome the devil in his wilderness temptation. The demons know who Jesus is in the tabernacle and on the altar. He is the Holy One of God. The demon confronting Jesus uses words that look like a prayer: "I know who you are, the Holy One of Israel." The demon recognizes Jesus but refuses to bow down before him.

C.S. Lewis notes that we make two mistakes about demons. We either assume they do not exist, or we have an obsessive interest in them. I might say that, with shows and movies about Satan, we are doing both.

Jesus was an exorcist. He freed many people from evil spirits, demons, devils, fallen angels. That's fact, not fantasy. God is pure spirit and he created angels, pure spirits with free will. Some of them chose evil. They hate us and want to ruin our souls and our lives. All of us are tempted by them and when we sin we lose our innocence, our joy, and even our freedom.

If a demon possessed person came into our church today, it would say things that almost sound right but not quite. Today, we must not believe the lies that the demons always tell: What a silly thing you believe. Whoever heard of a God who can create from nothing, then become part of that creation, redeeming it and transforming it into an image of God.

Without the Lord in our life, we will be at the devil's mercy to believe those lies that the world tells our young people. In the hour of greatest darkness, Jesus was condemned and killed. What was the lie: It's too much for one

man. Don't bother. That is why the victory of Jesus is so total at the resurrection, because it came on the heels of the greatest darkness.

## **Psalm**

Should we fear this God like the people of old did? I hope not. The psalm tells us two possible responses to entering into the real presence of God. The first is to come into his presence with thanksgiving. Let us joyfully sing songs to him. Let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord who made us. The other possible reaction to this amazing gift is to harden our hearts against God.

If we get this wrong, our lives will be messed up. I know it's difficult in a world which tells us in a thousand ways that we are our own gods, the masters of our own ships. But if we follow that 'wisdom', we will be shipwrecked. We will be easy prey for the demons.

## **1 Corinthians**

In this letter to the Corinthians, Paul has been pointing to the fact that there is nothing wrong with human institutions and friendships and family relationships, or even money. However, all of these should point to the greater relationship with God. There is nothing in the world that is strictly forbidden. However, when the good things of the world become the focus and goal of our lives, we have left God out. In fact we have made the decision to worship the creation instead of the creator. That's idolatry. That's where the demons come in. Without God, there are no limits. There is only greed and lust and envy and all the rest. Not everyone will be possessed by these things, but we will be on our own against the devil. That makes us pretty easy pickings.

## **Call To Conversion**

Like the possessed man, we are in the middle of a battle for possession of our souls. In this possessed man, we are to see ourselves, sinners who must be converted to God and freed from the slavery to sin and the devil.

Only Christ can exorcise demons. That Same Christ continues to work through his Church today. Demon possession is clearly darkness and Jesus is clearly light. And when the two meet, darkness has absolutely no chance.

Jesus claims to be that mediator and that divine authority, and this is the Church that he established to make that authority known, especially in the sacraments. Let us tell the demons we will not be possessed. Let us not allow our hearts to be hardened. Let us this very mass, kneel before him in the Eucharist in genuine adoration. Let us sing to him. And, if we don't think we can sing, let us make a joyful noise to the Lord. Let us join ourselves to the divine exorcist. In so doing, we will not be overcome.

## Key Passages

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations to give thanks to your holy name, and make it our glory to praise you.*

**Collect:** *Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honour you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart.*

**Deuteronomy:** *Moses spoke to the people: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own kin. You shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord when you said: 'Let me not hear the voice of the Lord any more, or ever again see this great fire, lest I die.' Then the Lord replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you. I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them everything that I command him. Anyone who does not heed the words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will hold him accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak, that prophet shall die.'"*

**Psalms:** *O come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture. O that today you would listen to his voice. Do not harden your hearts as on the day when your ancestors tested me and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*

**1 Corinthians:** *Brothers and sisters, I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. The unmarried woman is concerned about the affairs of the Lord, so that she may be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is concerned about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.*

**Mark:** *The disciples went to Capernaum and, when the Sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing the man and crying with a loud voice came out of him. They kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching, with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.*