

## Our Path Out of the Jungle

Homily for January 28, 2018

Yard sales are intriguing. I don't go to them, but I find it interesting that "one person's trash is another person's treasure." Someone can't wait to get rid of CDs and DVDs— doesn't want them cluttering up the house anymore. Along comes a complete stranger and he just can't believe anyone would want to sell them. He buys them for a steal and drives home with a big smile thinking he just committed robbery. He brings the CDs and DVDs home, clutters up his own house with them, and he's as happy as can be.

Satan once had a yard sale. He thought he'd get rid of some of his old tools that were cluttering up his house. There was gossip, slander, adultery, lying, greed, and lust laid out on the tables. Interested buyers were perusing the tables looking for a good buy.

One customer, however, strolled way back in the garage and found on a shelf a very shiny tool. It looked well cared for. He brought it out to Satan and asked if it was for sale. "Oh, no!" Satan answered. "That's my tool. Without it, I couldn't wreck the world! It's my secret weapon!" "But what is it?" the customer inquired. "It's the tool of discouragement," the devil said.

Nothing takes the life right out of you more than discouragement. A discouraged spirit is a powerless spirit. It is an awful feeling — it feels like the wind has been knocked out of your soul.

Another word for discouragement is disheartened. When we are disheartened, we can feel like a limp balloon. Whereas a person who is encouraged and heartened is more like a helium-filled balloon that is taught and confident. The enemy of our soul likes nothing more than for us to feel disheartened and discouraged – like that taut-less balloon.

The tool of discouragement is handled most successfully by the devil when tempting us human beings to distrust and disobey God, which is stated explicitly in today's Psalm, where the Lord warns the Israelites:

*<sup>8</sup>Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,  
<sup>9</sup>when your ancestors tested me,  
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*

Mer'ibah and Massah", are the two names of the places where the Israelites grumbled against God. Massah in Hebrew means "testing," In Exodus 17, the people put God to the test. He's just finished delivering them from Pharaoh, leading them through the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus 15, now they get to Exodus 17, and they're thirsty and they ask is God among us are not. In other words, where is this so-called God, what has he done for us lately? So they put him to the test by doubting Moses and by doubting that God is actually with Moses. Mer'ibah in Hebrew means "contention", Why? Well because there was contention. There was another fight later on in the wilderness journey; this is in Numbers 20, where the people do the same thing again.

When we put God to the test and disobey him by being contentious the devil has us exactly where he wants us. Our hearts become hardened, and we grow disheartened as the devil's tool has successfully sown discouragement into our souls.

What is discouragement's antidote? Obedience. Did you notice how in today's Gospel, when Jesus addresses the demon, it convulses the man and comes out of him? There is a fundamental spiritual principle embodied here. Obedience to Jesus Christ will indeed liberate us from a heart oppressed by discouragement, but it does not happen without effort and a fight. The enemy of our soul wants us to remain deflated and will fight against Jesus command, but he has no ultimate power in the face of Jesus' authority. When we come to that place in our lives where we want more than anything else to listen to Jesus and follow him, we will experience deliverance, even in the face of the enemies' resistance.

An Army man had been a heavy drinker for 35 years. For all those years he had been angry - angry at everyone and everything. Finally, he encountered Christ, and his whole life began to change, like the man in the Gospel.

He was speaking once before a group of medical people. He told them of his personality change, how he was now sober as he once had been drunk; considerate as he once had been severe; concerned for others as once he had been selfish and self-serving.

A psychiatrist, who believed that personalities are so firmly set in early life that no one can change, protested to the Colonel that at his age a person could not have such a radical transformation.

"Well," replied the Colonel, "that may be true. But I am under new management - I answer to another authority - the highest and truest there is."

The 12<sup>th</sup> century doctor of the Church St. Bernard of Clairvaux said something similar when he wrote:

***"When God forgives a sinner who humbly confesses his sin, the devil loses dominion over the heart he had taken."***

So how do we come to the place where we can more fully discover the soul being under new management?

Let me try to answer this with a story.

There was a missionary that got lost in the jungle with nothing around him but bush and a few cleared places. He finally found a small village and asked one of the natives if he could lead him out of the jungle. The native said he could. "All right," the missionary said, "Please, show me the way." They walked for hours through dense brush hacking their way through unmarked jungle. The missionary began to worry and said, "Are you quite sure this is the way? Where is the path?" The native said. "In this place there is no path. I am the path."

Our path out of the jungle of this world is Jesus.

It is this theme that is at the heart of our Old Testament and Gospel readings.

Moses, hundreds of years before Jesus came, spoke of a prophet who would be raised up and would surpass him. I want you to appreciate for the Jewish people no one had more authority than Moses. When Rabbi's taught, they would trace their teaching back to Moses. In Deuteronomy 34 which records the death of Moses are these words:

**Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.**

And yet here in Deuteronomy 18 Moses anticipates the day would come when another voice would sound forth.

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.*

For the Jewish people, they puzzled over this passage, wondering who could this person possibly be? Enter Jesus in today's Gospel. What did Mark write?

*They were astounded at his teaching,  
for he taught them as one having authority,  
and not as the scribes.*

This passage is better understood when interpreted with Deuteronomy 18 in mind. The people were not denigrating the scribes. They knew they did not speak based on their authority but rather on the authority of Moses. Jesus, however, did not talk in this manner. Instead, he speaks with authority.

The Greek word for authority is "exousia". "Ousia" means "substance." "Ex" means "out of". Jesus is speaking out of his "own substance". That's what it means "exousia". What Mark is stating here is that the word who spoke to Moses and through Moses to every other teacher in Israel is now speaking on his own authority. And who in the synagogue is it that identifies who Jesus is? That's right, the demon-possessed man.

*"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."*

Jesus was not simply another in a long line of prophets but the one Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18. The one in whose mouth God would place his very words. This is why Jesus is able on his own authority to expel the demon.

**Quiet come out of him.**

We must draw the following lesson from this reading. We are to listen to Jesus.

When we learn to submit our lives entirely to Jesus, the disordered and discouraging parts of our lives come back together. Those who learn to submit to Christ realize there is none greater. But how hard this can be for us to do. For like the demon, we think Jesus will destroy us. What he wants to put to death is not us, but everything that keeps us from living freely and confidently because he is the path leading us out of the jungle of this world.

Let the devil have his tool of discouragement. We aren't buying what he is selling because we are choosing to listen to him who has authority over our souls, our Lord Jesus Christ.