

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus is not just the exorcist we saw last weekend, he is also a physician - a healer. Today he heals a relative of Peter, who was still called Simon at this point.

Our Gospel opens right after the expulsion of a demon in the synagogue. The main Sabbath meal at around noon followed the synagogue service. If you've been to Capernaum, you know that the house of Simon is only a few hundred feet down the street.

Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever. Jesus is attentive, touches her by the hand, and lifts her up. So it seems that Jesus was also attentive to the smaller sufferings of human life, the basic things that we all struggle with, like sickness and illness.

Word got out from the exorcism at the synagogue earlier that day. But since it was the Sabbath, people waited until after sundown to start bringing the ill or possessed to the door of Simon's house.

Mark is always clear to distinguish between a healing miracle - like a woman with a fever, and an exorcism - people who are possessed. You'll hear some modern commentators say... when they were talking about demons back then, they thought that all sickness was the result of demons. That's just not true. Jesus makes a distinction between evil spirits and sickness. We should too.

Too many people today see belief in the existence of angels and demons, along with exorcism and demonic possession, as something from a primitive, superstitious worldview, a relic from the first century, a throwback to the Middle Ages, or to a time when mental health issues weren't well understood.

We do know that Satan is the leader of all the fallen angels. He and these demons try to tempt us into disobeying God today just as he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But Jesus has power over them. Confrontation with the devil is a common theme in Jesus' life. He didn't tell us that the devil was just a metaphor for evil, or a superstition. He tells us that the devil is real.

The Internet, network news and the front pages of our newspapers today show us the many manifestations of evil in our society and world.

In an exorcism today, the Church asks in the name of Jesus that a person or object be protected against, or liberated from, the power of the Evil One. The Church received the power and office of exorcizing from Jesus. A

major exorcism can be performed only by a priest with permission of the bishop.

We don't know who the exorcist is for our Archdiocese, but we do know that the exorcist for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis is a pastor over in Brookville - about an hour drive from here. He gets about 1800 calls and emails a year. So demons are close, and real, and we can open a door for the demonic with old fashioned Ouija boards, some internet sites and casual dabbling with the occult that too many kids consider as cool. In the battle against demons, we have the assistance of divine grace and the angels. The forces of good always outnumber the forces of evil. Our Blessed Mother and our Guardian Angels are powerful allies, along with the sacraments that nourish and strengthen our Christian life.

The world that Jesus encountered was filled with demons, and he came to exorcize them. Jesus shared this power of exorcism with his apostles and his Church. Exorcism and healing are both signs of salvation and the coming of the Messiah. Jesus comes into this world to touch the misery of human life, to heal us, even down to the very small things like the misery of a fever. He has the power to bring peace to us in the midst of our suffering. The church picked the first reading from Job for today to illustrate that Jesus comes into this world not just to cast out the devil - he's also Jesus the healer.

In these days, when the gifts are not being brought forward at the offertory, it seems an appropriate time to remind us that at Mass, we offer to God the bread and wine that represent all of creation including ourselves and our joys *and* our suffering.

This gives meaning to our suffering now as we walk through this valley of tears and we taste the drudgery and the misery that Job talked about in the first reading. Yes, Jesus comes into the world to heal and he shows us his power over sickness and suffering. But his mission is not to heal every single sick person. The healings he does are signs of the kingdom of God.

The Anointing of the Sick that Fr. Paul is offering to any of us today is a sacrament, but it's not only for those who are at the point of death. This sacrament is open to anyone with a chronic or serious medical, mental or emotional condition, or anyone of "advanced age" who hasn't been anointed in the last year. And it can be repeated. Only priests and bishops are ministers of this sacrament, using oil blessed by our Archbishop.

The Anointing of the Sick is one of the holy anointings that mark the Christian life: anointing in Baptism sealed our new Christian life in us, anointing in Confirmation strengthened us for the combat of this life. The Anointing of the Sick fortifies us when facing any reminders that our life on earth is like the wind.

Even the Psalm today is saying that God has the power to heal us. We have a God who heals the brokenhearted. We have a God who knows everything. He knows what you're going through. He knows about your suffering. He's not ignorant of the misery, drudgery, illness and suffering that human beings experience in this valley of tears. So the God of the Bible is not a distant God.

It is that God who becomes human in Jesus and touches the hand of Simon's mother-in-law and says get up, be healed. That's the God who comes to us in the ongoing ministry of Jesus. That ministry of Jesus is present to us in this Eucharist and is also present in the Sacrament of Anointing that Fr. Paul brings us today. That's what Jesus' ministry is all about.

Amen?

- Deacon Jack Schaefer