

Begin each day with a prayer...



Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,

On this **4th Sunday in Ordinary Time** in today's Gospel we hear about Jesus encountering a man with an unclean spirit. Evidently the unclean spirit had taken over aspects of the man's personality. The man appeared to be talking incoherently because Jesus orders him to be quiet - and the unclean spirit left him. What first looked like destruction turned out to be liberation.

The Catholic Church continues Jesus' ministry of exorcism - casting out unclean spirits. In recent years many priests and deacons have taken formal training to properly administer the new rite of exorcism. I have not taken that training, but I recognize that authority as part of the priestly ministry. Before baptizing a child or an adult, a priest performs a very simple exorcism - not because that the person is possessed, but because he will have to face demonic temptations and attacks. For that reason, the priest says an exorcism declaring the superiority of Christ's power. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation or some other pastoral encounter, I will sometimes sense that a spiritual force has a hold on the person. As part of the absolution or some other prayer, I will quietly tell the evil spirit to leave.

In Christian tradition, prayers of exorcism are generally performed softly - unlike what the movies depict. Once a parish priest brought a young girl named Agnese Salamoni to Padre Pio - St. Pio of Pietrelcina. People had put Agnese on a pedestal. She was the "model girl of the parish." But suddenly Agnese fell into a state of depression, leaving her paralyzed. Although Padre Pio was not a formal exorcist, he sensed the presence of a demonic power. He simply said, "Be gone." The girl improved, but her cure was not instantaneous. It required much subsequent prayer.

Now, I am sure few of you look at yourself as an exorcist. Still, God could use any of us to speak a word that brings liberation. An example: You may have heard of Dr. Alveda King - Martin Luther King Jr.'s niece. In the 70's she had received two abortions. Since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court ruling had legalized abortion, she believed Planned Parenthood counselors who told her, "It's not a baby; it's just a blob of tissue." Pregnant a third time, she mentioned to her grandfather - Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. - what Planned Parenthood had told her. "No," he said, "they are lying. It is a child." Dr. Alveda King embraced her child, and she went on to seek forgiveness and healing for her earlier abortions. Today she has a deep peace - a freedom from anxiety - that makes her a powerful leader in the Pro-Life movement.

If we begin each day with a prayer, Jesus can use us to bring liberation, healing and peace to others. We need first ask - like Dr. Martin Luther King Sr. - that we will have peace, freedom from fear, within our own hearts. In Mass today, we ask Jesus to protect us from anxiety - especially the fear that so easily turns into anguish. It can cause incoherent behavior. It can paralyze. Only Jesus can free us from such demonic powers. Defeating that fear, which borders on anguish, requires the power of Christ - his intervention in our lives.

Have a Blessed Week!

Fr. Rafal Ligenza

St. Joseph Parish Administrator