

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Dcn. Marco Albán G.
Mary Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, WA.

Readings:
[Dt 18:15-20](#); [Psalm 95:1-2,6-7,7-9](#);
[1 Cor 7:32-35](#);
Alleluia [Mt 4:16](#); [Mk 1:21-28](#)

Spiritual uncleanliness in me? Help me, Lord!

Walking with Saint Mark through his Gospel, let's notice he describes episodes quickly and tends to avoid detailed descriptions. Therefore, when he provides details, we need to slow down and pay close attention¹.

Today Saint Mark describes the first miracle in his Gospel: religious people were astonished at Jesus' teaching. Suddenly, one in their midst reacts, questioning the Lord because an unclean spirit possesses him. Our Lord, demonstrating his authority, cast the evil spirit out. The demon has no option but to obey. Jesus doesn't invoke anybody; he just commands; he doesn't speak in the name of anybody, not even in the name of God; instead, He does it on His sole authority².

Mark teaches us with actions who Jesus is: The Holy One of God whose Word cleans and transforms when we engage him³.

For most of us, it may be challenging to relate to this exorcism. It is difficult to imagine, for example, how we would react if we see someone convulsing and screaming towards Jesus during the Elevation of the Holy Eucharist while kneeling today.

Therefore, let's reframe this episode to find parallels we may be able to relate to as immature disciples. Leveraging bishop Mueggenborg's reflection for this weekend⁴, picture *'Jesus coming to our church gathering to perform His first miracle and cast out the evil spirits present in the community. He begins not by overcoming the evil that is out there -in the world of the unfaithful, but by first casting out the evil that is present in here - within the lives of us who are trying to be faithful. There are many ways we use religion to justify our shortcomings, to cover the unclean spirits of our lives. Sometimes excellence disguise*

arrogance; wisdom disguise gossip; spiritual detachment cloaks our disregard for the injustices in the world around us. Those are some of the unclean spirits from which Jesus wants to free us so that we can be disciples who follow the Lord and do His will all the time and not just disciples who do our own will in the Lord's name sometimes.

What do we want Him to cast out from our lives? How can we even see the spiritual dirt we need to be freed from?

*With conviction, let's ask the Lord **to help** us identify and root out self-deceptions in our lives. To be good disciples, we must first allow Jesus to heal us of our complacency and blindness with sin and weakness. Sometimes it is easier to justify our shortcomings than it is to deal with them. Providentially our Mother Church brings us **some help** in the words of John of the Cross⁵, Saint, and Doctor of the Church. He teaches that even faithful church-attending Christians can succumb to the Seven Deadly Sins if we become complacent in our spiritual diligence. Saint John of the Cross describes the following specific ways in which any of the seven "unclean spirits" can dwell even in the hearts of the practicing faithful:*

1st Pride. — *It is the attitude where we think of ourselves "better than others" because of our religious practices. In the process, we may even criticize others for not practicing our faith in the same way.*

2nd Avarice. — *Frequently, this vice manifests as the desire for "excess in religious things"; it is the sense that having more religious items will make us holier. It can also be the multiplication of spiritual practices in a competitive way or a way that leads us to **only** care about our own relationship with God rather than assisting others in their relationship with God.*

3rd Spiritual Lust. — *A particularly dangerous tendency. It is the "desire for spiritual consolation for its own sake." This desire manifests itself when we pray because we want the consolation of peace or other positive feelings that bring us affirmation. This desire signals*

that we seek the effects of a relationship with God more than the relationship itself. The consoling effects of prayer can become spiritually addictive. That is why sometimes the Lord withholds His consolation precisely to move us beyond the pursuit of spiritual practices for the sake of their emotional effects.

4th Anger. — *It is when we become a "source of contention rather than fostering communion and love." Our spiritual life's very purpose is to help us love God and our neighbor in authentic ways. When our faith life leads us to be filled with anger, then something unclean is filling us. This anger manifests, for example in our next debate, as religious judgmentalism, self-righteousness, or condemnatory attitudes towards the other. It is a desire to punish rather than to convert and reconcile.*

5th Spiritual Gluttony. — *It is a desire to "strive for spiritual taste rather than spiritual purity." It includes the desire for more and more penances or practices and the feeling of being respected as a "spiritual person" in the community. It manifests when we pursue one ministry experience after another without a desire for conversion and change but for participation only.*

6th Spiritual Envy. — *This occurs when we actually "feel sad about the spiritual growth of others." It can lead us to discredit the spiritual lives of others or to seek their faults actively. It can cause us to intentionally not participate in a ministry because of others participating in it, block somebody to participate in it, or discredit the benefits offered through that apostolate.*

Last Spiritual Sloth. — *This vice leads us to "give up in prayer because it is difficult" or to "measure God by ourselves and NOT ourselves by God!" Eventually, it can cause self-deception, making us believe that God desires what we already want. It can lead us to the temptation of re-creating God in our own image and likeness. It can even lead us to spiritual arrogance in which we prefer to establish our own norms for a faith life rather than*

accepting the guidelines given by Jesus and handed down in the life of the Church through history.

Returning to Mark's Gospel, recall that the man with the unclean spirit speaks up only after Jesus has issued His teaching and that the unclean spirit cries out, "Have you come to destroy us?" When the man heard Jesus proclaiming the Gospel's message, he realized what the teaching meant and that he would need to change his life. It is that resistance to change that gave rise to his cry, "Have you come to destroy us?" '

Let's give credit to the man with the unclean spirit. He actually listened to Jesus, took time to understand the meaning of our Lord's message for his life, and to realize the necessary changes for him to follow God's way. His resistance to conversion is an image of our resistance.

Let's, therefore, trust that the healing power of Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament will pulverize our spiritual dirt and wash it out if we let him. Let's ask our Lord for light to see where He wants to wash out our uncleanness. and the courage to do our part.

¹ Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. (2021). In Sourcebook 2021 - The Almanac for Pastoral Liturgy (p. 80). Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publication.

² Sagrada Biblia. (Edición Latinoamericana ed., Digital, pp. Comentario a Mc 1, 21-28). (2016). Navarra, España: Universidad de Navarra. Facultad de Teología.

³ José Bortolini. Orientaciones homiléticas año B pp 141. (2008). Paulus Editora. Sao Paulo. Brasil.

⁴ Bishop Mueggenborg, Weekly Reflections on the Sunday Gospel. Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time. <https://protocathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Fourth-Sunday-in-Ordinary-Time.pdf>

⁵ Saint John of the Cross. Dark Night of the Soul. <http://carmelitemonks.org/Vocation/DarkNight-StJohnoftheCross.pdf>