

## **January 28, 2018**

Dut 18:15-20; 1 Cor 7:32-35; Mk 1:21-28

Is there such a thing as the Devil and evil spirits? We hear in today's Gospel, and in many other places in scripture, about such beings - but what do we think of these today? Are they real, or are they a superstition of many years ago. It is clear that when Jesus, Paul, and many saints through the years speak of the actual presence of the Devil, and discuss his continued influence in the world, they are not speaking figuratively. The language they are using does not just reflect a cultural phenomenon that we have become more enlightened about and can dismiss. Although in past years people wrongly attributed some mental illnesses to evil spirits - this does not mean they were not operating elsewhere. The Church teaches us that when we say in the Our Father "and deliver us from evil" this is not a statement about bad things in the world that we give the label "evil" to - that we are referring to the evil that derives from the Devil and the fallen angels. However, the message today is that despite this reality we don't need to fear these beings - we have a more powerful guy on our side.

First of all, we should get clear on one thing: our belief or disbelief in things spiritual does not rest on our senses or on scientific observations. Some would tell you you should believe in a thing because of something a person's sense experiences, or disbelieve a thing due to a lack of scientific proof. This all gets us to focus on a false and unscientific error - that things either exist or don't exist because we can sense them or study them. Our modern world has become more bound than ever to think this. Things don't exist or not exist because we can see them or measure them scientifically. Seeing a thing gives us information about it, scientific study of a thing gives us information about it - but this doesn't show us all there is to know about the thing - and it doesn't tell us that there is nothing more out there (or we should just close up science because there is nothing left to discover) - we don't know what we have not yet been able to see or measure. Before we invented telescopes there were distant galaxies - they did not begin to exist when we developed a method to scientifically study them. Radiation did not begin to exist because we invented the Geiger counter and other scientific methods to study it. Many things existed before science figured out how to sense them, and other things do too - failure to be able to sense a things does not prove its non-existence, that in fact, is poor science. No proof does not prove anything. So it is possible that a worlds of spirits, souls - and an eternal God - exists.

The being we call Satan or the Devil is the Archangel Lucifer who due to rebellion and his free choice gave up his close place with God and now is in that place of willful separation from God called Hell - and he wants others to join him there. Scripture teaches us (from Genesis, actually) that this guy has been messing with us for a while. He uses crafty means to encourage us to make the same choice to turn away from God and surrender the birthright to share in the eternal inheritance of heaven as children of God. He even tempts Jesus at one point to turn away from his mission and deny who he is.

The good news is Jesus Christ. In our second reading St. Paul tells his readers: *I should like you to be free of anxieties. I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction.* Satan would like to distract us from God. He would like to place in our path many other things that can distract us. Paul charges us to keep focused on God. The good news is that Satan and evil spirits only have the power we give them. Look at Jesus in story of his temptation in the desert, he keeps himself focused, and eventually when he tells Satan to leave he just goes - can't force, he can only trick. In the Gospel we see a display of the power of Jesus over the unclean spirits. Staying close to Jesus aligns us with the one of whom it was said: *What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.* The Devil uses manipulation and tricks to get us to do sinful things that eventually lead us to giving up on God, that eventually lead us to choose to abandon our faith. He is more interested in having you do that than in getting you to sin. When the evil spirits in the Gospel are speaking the truth about Jesus he silences them - why - because if they are saying something true it is just because they intend to twist it later. His message. "Keep focused on me and forget what the evil spirits are saying."

Evil spirits work through the mouths of the many false prophets we have in our world, they help to encourage us to believe the crazy and the sinful, unreligious things that the world promotes and that pop up in our minds. Jesus is the true Prophet and King and Priest. He is the one who guides us on the way, the one who offers the sacrifice that washes away our sins, the one who is the King calling us to his kingdom. Don't turn away from all that. Don't listen to the false prophets of the world, but rather listen to the true King, Priest, and Prophet Jesus Christ. It was of him that God speak of through Moses in our first reading: *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.* As we move forward in this Mass and focus on the words and deeds of Jesus, and as we participate in his sacrifice, let's remember: there is no power on earth or in the spiritual world that can match Jesus - and nothing that can harm us if we keep ourselves near to the person of our savior Jesus Christ.