

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time B 2021

When nature shows its power through snow or fire or a deadly virus or a natural calamity, we realize how powerless we can be. These elements of nature can easily disable our technology and health systems, disrupt our regular schedules and activities and yes, turn everything in our lives into chaos. Who would have thought that a virus, a microscopic organism so small, can put our big whole world into a standstill? We like to think that we are in control but before these certain forces like these forces of nature or deadly virus, we are not in control of our lives.

This unsettling reality can give us a glimpse into the heart and mind of the man who came to Jesus in today's Gospel. We can only imagine what his life must have been like, to have this demon within him, ruling his life, destroying everything he hold dear. Maybe he tried to fight it but to no avail. Maybe each morning he thought that day would be different, but it was not. The demon's power was too great for him. It controlled him and his actions. Then, one day he came into the synagogue and there he met Jesus. Jesus looked at the man and addressing the demon inside of him, said, "Quite! Come out of him!" And he was set free.

God created us and the world we live in to be good, but we are *in statu viae*, that is, in a state of journey in becoming perfect and as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, "the condition of those working towards Beatific Vision, but those who have not yet actually arrived at it." Because of this state or condition, there are imperfections in our lives and in the world that we live in such as our sinful human tendencies or natural calamities happening. For this reason, there are forces of evil at work in our lives, forces of evil outside of us and forces of evil inside of us that tries to veer us away from our path to perfection. These are the demons that can take control of our lives such as hate, prejudice, injustice, and greed. These are the forces that would destroy our lives and rob us of the freedom, dignity, and purpose that God has given us. And within all of them lurks, of course, the evil one, the devil. And sometimes we think that if we just have the right ideas or better circumstances, maybe practice self-discipline, we can bring ourselves into spiritual freedom and defeat these demons in our lives. But we cannot do it by ourselves. We need the power and the person of Jesus Christ. Just as the snow gives way to the strength of the sun, so the powers that seem to dominate us can recede before the power of the Risen Christ. Jesus can do for us what He did for the man in the Gospel that afternoon in the synagogue. He can heal us. He can strengthen us, and yes, He can free us from the bondage of sin and evil if we let him in into our lives.

Throughout human history and our own personal journey, there has been a spiritual battle going on. We cannot avoid being involved in this battle as long as we are here on earth because the evil one, the devil, is just too interested in making our lives miserable, now and forever, by separating us from God. But we can see that Jesus was able to expel the demon from this possessed man easily and definitively. So, there are ways that can help us overcome the temptations and the lure of the devil plaguing us in our lives.

First, stay close to Christ. It was because this man was close to Christ that Jesus was able to expel the demon. The same goes for us if we stay close to Christ, especially through our regular prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Second, stay close to the truth. The devil's main weapon is deception. He manipulates our selfish tendencies by spreading lies and half-truths. This is one reason he fights to keep us out of the confessional. Confession is the gift of truth: we face the truth about ourselves by confessing our sins, failures, and weaknesses, and God, through the priest, reminds us of his truth: mercy, forgiveness, unconditional grace. The devil loves the darkness; confession unleashes the light.

Third, stay close to others in need. The devil is the lord of selfishness, and Christ is the Lord of love. When we resist our selfishness by serving others, whatever their need may be, we weaken the devil's influence in our lives.

Every Christian, every one of us, is a spiritual warrior. Today, as Jesus renews his commitment to us in this Mass, let us renew our commitment to him who has come to save us. Whatever force inside of us and outside of us that veer us away from our path to perfection and Beatific Vision, what Jesus did for the man in the synagogue He can do for us. Let us surrender our lives to Him who has the power to cast out our demons by staying close to him and the truth and by helping each other most especially those who are in need. Amen.