

4th Sunday (B)

28th January 2018

'Avoiding the devil'

Dt 18: *I will raise up a prophet ... I will put words into his mouth* Ps 94:
Harden not your hearts 1Cor 7: *the unmarried can devote themselves to the*
Lord's affairs Mk 1: 21–28: *He taught them with authority.*

We've barely begun to read the Gospel of Mark in these 'Ordinary Sundays of the Year' — and already Our Lord is quickly into His ministry. He has called His first four apostles; He has taught in the synagogue at Capernaum that will become His base; and very soon He will begin to perform healing miracles for the physically ill, and show also that He can and does forgive sins. Along with these other aspects of His exercise of divine authority, He also casts out devils, "unclean spirits." The New Testament speaks often of this part of Christ's healing ministry. In today's passage of the Gospel, the demon — the fallen angel — who has invaded this poor man is immediately aware of the presence of the Son of God, and that it will be cast out. There is an immediate awareness by the evil spirit of who Jesus is; it is under no illusions, and shudders to know that Our Lord has far greater power than its hold over this man.

Some may dismiss this passage as simply a naïve

text from a long time ago, and having no place in a scientific age such as our own. I think that they would be very wrong to say that. Evil spirits — fallen angels in league with the devil — certainly exist. The Gospel is very clear in distinguishing illnesses from the influences of the devil; and the Church also has always held that healing from Christ can when necessary include the casting-out of evil spirits by a ritual of prayer called exorcism.

We should be aware of three things: (i) not to dismiss the existence and influence of the devil; (ii) to refer anyone who is experiencing troubles from evil affliction to their parish priest for spiritual counsel and maybe a blessing of their home; (iii) to be comforted by the fact that the devil can easily be kept at bay by the power of Christ in prayer, the Sacraments and by avoiding any practices that have a demonic or pagan basis. Christ is the Son of God, and our union with Him in Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist are plenty to keep us protected as long as we studiously avoid un-Christian practices. Christ is the holy Son of God, and the devil and evil spirits are only (fallen)

angels — creatures, in other words, without the almighty power and divinity of God. So we need have nothing to fear, since our Lord Jesus is the stronger one, and has defeated the devil in His Cross and Resurrection. Still, the devil can wreak havoc when given permission. This usually comes through associating oneself in some practice or other that has a demonic, Satanic or pagan basis, and we should make sure that we have nothing to do with such things.

Examples of such things are all around us all, sadly: we should make sure to avoid them completely, and counsel others to do the same. Obvious examples include anything to do with foretelling the future, or in communicating with the dead: tarot cards, Ouija boards, mediums, clairvoyants, psychic nights etc. These are not harmless entertainments — either they are hoaxes, or they are very dangerous dabblings with the occult. There are venues that promote these things within our town, even in the High Street here and in local pubs. Don't go near them, and help others also to see the great danger in allowing the demons into one's life. If there is communing with the occult, then one places

oneself in real spiritual danger. We should not be naïve about this, but should obey our faith strictly in this matter.

There are other practices, also becoming rife in our society, that can open ourselves up to false, pagan, or demonic spiritual influence — especially those things that are based on eastern religions such as Reiki, yoga, or Tai Chi — they all intend to tap in to “spiritual energy” that clearly does not come from God, and so can only be from the evil one, however much it masquerades as healing or exercise. The Church teaches clearly that all these should be avoided, since they have false religions underpinning them. There are plenty of exercise regimes available that do not have a false mystical basis, but those that are based on pagan mysticism must be avoided, as they deliberately seek power that does not come from Christ. Our Lord has brought us all the spiritual peace that we need, through prayer and His presence in the Holy Eucharist and the Sacraments. Let us hold firm to His great blessings, and not seek after false power, knowledge and insights that He does not permit. The Lord Jesus is enough for us!