

## Mark 1:21-28

Only two-thirds of the American population believes in the devil, although more than half of these think Satan is just a symbol for evil, which means that few Americans believe he is a real spiritual being. If you were to have taken the same poll in Capernaum, you can be certain the numbers would have been much higher. In their church as they were worshipping, a man possessed by a demon began crying aloud. It would be pretty difficult to deny the existence of the devil and his evil angels when one of them is causing the man next to you to foam at the mouth and scream into your ear.

Where is that demon today? The man who was possessed is long dead. And the demon left that man when Jesus rebuked it. But Jesus did not tell the demon it could not enter another human being ever again. He told the demon to leave just that man in Capernaum. It is now 2,000 years later. For all that time that demon has been roaming the earth surely possessing one human after another, and causing one after another to deny that it is real. Where do you suppose that demon is right now...still over in Capernaum? Or perhaps somewhere nearer to us?

We do not know where that demon, or any of the demons are, but we do know where He who has authority over the demons is. Jesus promises to be in the water of Holy Baptism, in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and in His Holy Word preached into your ears and planted into your heart. To resist the devil we must flee to Christ. If we do not want the demons to grab hold of us, we must go to where our Lord Jesus, in love, keeps us close to Him.

It's rather interesting that God in His wisdom allows us to hear what comes out of the mouths of the devils. It is a wise man who seeks to know his enemy. In today's Gospel reading Jesus unmasks our enemy, and what he says is important for us to hear. *"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God."*

Far too many Christians have the idea that what they know in their head is enough. "As long as I know the facts of the Christian Faith, I am in the clear." But even that demon knew who Jesus was. That demon did not love Jesus, did not love hearing His Word, had no love for His Sacraments, had no real desire to be in church--except to cause trouble. And yet it knew Jesus well. It knew the facts of His virgin birth. It believed in His miracles. It believed, without any doubt, that Jesus was the Son of God. But such knowledge meant nothing. St. James underscores this truth when he writes, *"You believe in God? Even the demons believe and tremble."*

*"Faith without works is dead."* Without works, faith is not faith...it's just knowledge. The demon had that. But it did not have works. It had no love of God in its heart. It had no love for others. It had no love for the holy things of God. It had knowledge, but no works. And it never would. For God does not work the love of Jesus within the demons, but He does work within you. Christ did not die for the demons, but He died for you. Holy Baptism is not for the demons; it is for you. The Sacrament of Christ's body and blood is for you, not for the demons. God's Holy Word is not for the demons; it is preached, and taught, and given to you.

So God's Holy Spirit will never work faith within a demon, but He does within you. Through Baptism, through Holy Communion, through the hearing of the Word the Holy Spirit gave you faith in Christ, and keeps you in that faith. Through these holy things God's Spirit works the love of Christ in your heart so that it shows in how you live; so that yours is not a dead faith, like the demons have, but a faith that is living and active.

But here I need to ask a question--a question that you and I must ponder. Consider that when Jesus told the demon to be silent and come out of that man in Capernaum, this is exactly what happened. Uttering not a word, but crying out in a loud voice that demon obeyed Jesus and came out of that man. And this is not the only time that happened. Whenever Jesus ordered a demon, it obeyed Him. And so here is the question...Why is it that the demons obey Jesus, but you and I do not? The demons obeyed when Jesus spoke a word of command to them, so why is it that we, who are God's children, day after day disobey one command after another that God has given to us? You would think that it would be the other way around--that we who love God would obey Him, and that the demons who hate God would disobey Him. But that's not the way it is. Jesus orders the demon, and it obeys. Jesus tells us to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourself, and we disobey.

Now I suppose we could turn to our church's theologians and we would understand from them that when God speaks in His majesty He must be obeyed, but when He speaks through means--such as a parent, or a teacher, or one who instructs in the Word--we who are sinful can disobey. But it may be even more helpful if we turn to St. Paul when he says, *"The good that I wish (to do), I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish (to do)."*

It is certain that that demon obeyed Jesus not because it wanted to, but because it had to. When you and I disobey Jesus it's not because we want to, but because we are so weak in our flesh. The mark of a Christian is not what some think it is. A popular video on YouTube these days is a young man who says, "I love Jesus, but I hate religion." For him and others like him, Christians are not Christians if they fail to help their neighbor, or if they say unkind words to hurt another, or if they commit adultery, or if they have sinful desires within their heart and they act on them. That young man would have told St. Paul to his face, "You are no Christian because you do things you should not be doing." And that same young man would have told the demon in Capernaum, "You must be a good Christian because you obey Jesus."

Friends, St. Paul was a Christian because he was in Christ, and Christ was in him. Could others always see Christ in Paul? No, just like we also fail daily to show our faith. But your failings do not sever you from Jesus. Your failings are why Jesus died for you in the first place. He died for sinners like you and me, and He lives in sinners like you and me. And others will see this in how we live, but they will also see our utter sinfulness--our lusts, our selfishness, our pride.

If you want to find someone who always does what Jesus says to do, then go find that demon. It obeys Jesus, but not out of love--only because it has to. But if you want to find Jesus' Christians--those who love Him, who love His Word and His Sacraments, who love His church--then don't go looking for someone who always does what Jesus says, but look at the person in the pew hearing the Word of God next to you. Look at the sinner kneeling beside you here at God's Altar. You, my fellow sinners, are not without sin, but you are forgiven. For you have Jesus. You have a Savior. He did not suffer and die for demons, but He suffered and died for you. He does not call the demons His beloved children, but this is who you are through Holy Baptism.

Do you love to sin? No, you love Jesus. And His love for you will not keep you from ever sinning, but it does keep Him giving you here, week after week, His Word of Forgiveness, and His body and blood given and shed for you for the remission of your sins. Amen.