
23rd Sunday after Pentecost 2020

Ephesians 2:4-10 & Luke 8:26-39

Are demons real or are they a figment of someone's imagination? we may wonder. If we believe in angels, why should it be so difficult to accept the existence of demons? Demons are fallen angels. If you consider the devil's influence on humans, it's easy to acknowledge that Satan is real and dwells among us. When Flip Wilson's a comedian, once jokingly said, "The devil made me do it," he may not have realized it isn't a joke when we're talking about the biblical view of demonology. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was "tempted in every way as are we," but He did not give in to the devil's temptations.

There are thousands of exorcisms performed by the Catholic Church every year. Pope Francis has said that he believes that Satan is real and that the battle against evil is one he must fight every day. Some have had a firsthand experience with demons. In 1906, Clara Germana Cele, a Christian student at St. Michael's Mission in Natal, South Africa, went astray. For some reason, Cele prayed and made a pact with Satan when she was sixteen years old. Just days later, strange impulses overtook Cele. Religious artifacts like crucifixes repulsed her. She could speak and understand several languages, of which she had no previous knowledge. She became clairvoyant regarding the thoughts and histories of the people around her.

Nuns who attended to Cele reported that she produced horrible, animalistic sounds; she also levitated up to five feet in the air. Eventually, two priests performed an exorcism. Cele tried to strangle one priest with his stole. Over one hundred and seventy people witnessed her levitating as the priests read Scripture. Over two days, the rites of exorcism successfully drove the dark spirits from her body. (https://www.oddee.com/item_98653.aspx) That was over a hundred years ago, but what about something more recent.

Several years ago, in 1997, Mother Teresa underwent an exorcism after going through a bout of insomnia. The devil caused her inability to sleep, the Archbishop of Calcutta said. When the doctor informed the Archbishop, they could not find a medical reason for her sleeplessness; the Archbishop told Reuters he feared the devil might be attacking her. A 79-year-old Sicilian-born priest, Rosario Stroschio, who performed the exorcism, told Reuters the Nobel prize-winning nun had acted oddly just before the special prayers began. He said, "She was a little dazed and behaved strangely." The Archbishop said, "Maybe Mother Teresa was under harassment from Satan. But after the prayers, she was quite calm, and she slept peacefully". (Thursday, 6 September 2001, 20:27 GMT 21:27 UK BBC News)

In our Gospel reading this morning, a naked, homeless man suddenly emerged from the cemetery as one possessed by demons. He shouted at Jesus. When Jesus asks his name, the demon-possessed man says, "Legion" because there were so many demons in him. When Jesus exorcised the demons, they fled into a herd of pigs, went wild and ran off a cliff to their death. It seems very scary, and yet, all of that doesn't seem to frighten those people.

The strange part of Luke's Gospel is that the people became comfortable with the presence of evil. Here is a man filled with so many demons that his name is Legion. Luke talks about him as a frightening and dangerous individual. People had to chain him hand and foot, and it appears people in the community took turns watching over him. But no one is bothered by that. They are more comfortable with evil than with Christ. What scares them more than the man's erratic conduct is his calm and normal behaviour.

Luke tells us that, "When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid." Isn't that odd?

Luke concludes that, "Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region asked Jesus to leave them because they were overcome with fear." That is strange! The community puts up with this man who is naked and living in the cemetery but throw Jesus out of their community. And by doing that, they throw out the only hope their community has for redemption.

Yes, "good people" who consider themselves decent humans can and often perform evil acts. Temptations encouraged by demonic powers can create a lapse in our moral behaviour if we're not paying attention. Attractions can be so compelling we can fall for them quickly without realizing how far we've drifted from our Christian values. And the scariest part of all this is that it can happen to us. The most significant problem facing our society today is that we have become all too comfortable with evil.

At one time, society showed outrage at what is immoral, but not anymore. When we see others doing something immoral, we accept their misconduct without hesitation. It's not that we've forgive these people but rather excuse their behaviour. Someone once said, "We have forgotten how to blush."

Evil things happen when people lose their sense of shame. Here are a few examples. During an election, some people pass on information they know is a lie about a political opponent to tarnish their name. You've heard of Spraying graffiti on someone else's property. The next time you "pay at the pump," be careful. Criminals are putting credit card skimmers on gas station pumps all over the nation to steal credit and debit card information. These people turn into immoral monsters who don't care about the hurt and damage they cause to others.

We come to Church every Sunday to worship God and feel safe in our sanctuary, but in the outside world it's a different story. Our society has gotten so used to the evil in our culture they have stopped speaking out against sin. They are no longer afraid of the demons in our society. They have made peace with evil. As a society, we accept drug and alcohol abuse, racism, and killing unborn babies.

Yes, it takes great courage to live the Christian life and stand firm in your faith. In his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:13), Paul wrote, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be of courage; be strong."

Do we want to see change in our society and improve it? I'm sure your answer is yes! Well, it's amazingly simple. Determine the problem, read the Bible, and live by the Word of God. If you are skeptical and think that Christian living will have no effect, think again. Even one life can make a difference. One voice, one action, added to a lot of other single voices can bring changes. What's missing in our culture today are Christian voices that take a stand against the evil around us.

Amen!