

Bishop's Reflection – 4th Sunday

Unclean spirits. What are we to make of them? The moment you ask the question, there are an endless number of opinions, and very little common ground. After all, some believe in an elaborate pantheon of demons and forms of possession, while others want nothing to do with the whole topic and brush it away like dust on a sill.

I am intrigued by the fact that they are considered “unclean”, as if, by their very nature they stand opposed to the “Holy Spirit”. No matter how we conceive of them, they are described for what is lacking and what has become of them. Much like us, who, due to sin, have become susceptible to an unintended tendency in our desires. No longer focused on the beauty and magnificence of God's Will for us, we strive for lesser goods, perceived goods, often at the detriment of God's true purpose for us. Putting the “unclean spirits” over against the “Holy Spirit”, therefore, doesn't try to resolve the argument between those who believe in demons and possession and those who don't, but tries to establish common ground, so that we may relate this event to our own lives.

“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?” These are words of defiance and opposition, words stemming from a fear that God comes to destroy that which has become such an integral part of us. Letting go of what we have come to know, and accepting what we do not yet fully comprehend, results in conflict. Like a patient in conflict with his doctor, we can choose against our own good. If the truth be told, we want it both ways, spare us the choice; heal me, but don't ask me to change my ways.

“Be silent!” Christ is literally telling us to shut up. How can God take away our confusion, if we allow the confusion to prevail? “Be silent!” It's the first part of listening; it's also the first part of openness and the hope to receive. Be silent and let His Word take root in you, you might be surprised at the gift it brings.

“But God,” you might protest, and God puts His finger to His lips and quietly tells us to hush. Sometimes there is no end to our protesting, no end to the reasons we give. “Be silent, and come out of him!” Christ's words remain the same. There is wisdom in “silence”, in the face of all that can be said or done, wisdom in allowing God to be God once more.

Silence before God, and his authority, in what he says and does, often leads to amazement. We see it in those who witnessed the exorcism, but also in all those who came to know of it, as “Jesus' fame spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.” We see it in our lives, too, as we fall silent before him and begin to see our lives, our needs and our desires from a different perspective. The resultant change, in listening to his command to “Be silent!”, can lead to a new amazement of his authority, his mercy and his healing touch.

Who says that Christ no longer casts out unclean spirits? Who says that Christ no longer exercises power and authority to free us from our own trappings? Who says that his voice has grown soft and silent with the passing of time? The Lord continues to speak to his people. He continues to stop us dead in our destructive tracks. He continues to call us to be silent and know that he is God. He continues to send his Holy Spirit to fill us with fullness of life. Blessed is the one who listens to his command and welcomes him in silence.