

Monday 4th Week Year 1; Catholic Schools Week; Mt. De Sales Academy

I. A Little of the Devil

A. I don't want to upset anyone during Catholic Schools Week, but I have to tell you that my Catholic elementary school career was not so good. In other words, I got into a lot of trouble. One day, when Sister Mary Janet left her classroom for but a moment, general mayhem ensued among all fifty of us. When she returned, she caught me in the act of flinging a little piece of crayon with my plastic ruler at a classmate, a few seats away. In a room full of juvenile delinquents, Sister Janet voted me most delinquent.

B. That night, mom and dad were summoned to the convent where Sister Janet informed them of my bad behavior. I was home while this appointment was going on, shaking in my boots, so I don't know exactly what was said. But I think mom and dad apologized and told Sister Janet they were doing the best they could with me. "I know you are," Sister said to them, "but your son has a touch of the devil in him." Years later, mom also told me how embarrassed she was when my dad responded to Sister Janet by saying something to the effect that he would extract hell out of me . . . but his exact words are lost to history!

II. Tormented by Demons

A. I thought of that old story from my past as I reflected on today's Gospel which tells how Jesus liberated a man who was tormented by demons. That poor man was in fact possessed by evil spirits; the evil one occupied the very center of his personality. As we listened closely to St. Mark's description of this unfortunate man, we can see how the devil and his legions distorted God's image in him. There was nothing anyone could do until Jesus appeared. Only he was strong enough to drive those evil spirits out of that man and restore him to health and tranquility.

B. Such things still happen and the Church, following the example of Jesus, prays for people who are in the grip of the devil to be set free and the prayer of the Church, called an exorcism, is powerful and effective.

III. The Evil One Is Real

A. Thankfully, such cases are very rare, and you and I this morning don't have to dwell on such a terrible thing as demonic possession. But all of us do have to acknowledge that we have a touch of the devil in us. If we compare our souls to a house, we might say that the evil one doesn't occupy the first floor or the second floor but he just might occupy a little guest room somewhere down in the basement. Let us make no mistake: the evil one is real, he's around, and he has designs on us.

B. In fact, the evil one likes it best when we deny that he exists. For when we imagine there is no such thing as a devil or an evil spirit, then they can work on us in hidden ways and thus do a lot of damage. We may even say that the devil does his most effective work when he's undercover. He won't do anything spectacular; he'll just try to influence us in subtle ways. The devil is that voice that makes us resent our parents when they tell us we should do something for our own good. The devil is that voice that makes us envious of a classmate or causes us to be discouraged when we're trying to do our best. And if we open the door of our hearts to the evil one, there's no telling what kind of trouble he'll get us into . . .

IV. How To Counteract the Devil

A. So what are we to do? Even though we only have a small touch of the devil rather than a full dose, we need to do the same thing that the possessed man in the Gospel did. We need to put ourselves in Jesus' path and we need to let him work in our minds and hearts . . . so let us ask: How we can put ourselves in his path? And what will he do for us?

B. The first way we encounter Jesus is prayer. Sometimes we pray prayers from memory; sometimes we just open up and tell the Lord what's going on in our lives. But if we take time to pray each day-that is-if we open our hearts each day to Jesus, he will be present to us just as he was present to man in the Gospel.

C. A second and very powerful way we encounter Jesus is the sacraments. When we go to Holy Communion we truly receive Christ's Body and Blood. This means Jesus wants to be very close to us in a very real way so that he can help us in all our trials and temptations. When we go to confession, Jesus responds with mercy and is with us to help us reform our lives. What a beautiful thing: the Lord is as close to us as he was to all those he encountered when he walked the earth 2,000 years ago.

D. A third way we encounter Jesus is in one another. How blest you are to attend Mt. De Sales where you are formed in the faith and where the school creates a wonderful environment that encourages you to help one another know Jesus and practice your faith. This is one of the main reasons I like to celebrate Catholic Schools Week!

V. Conclusion

A. So here's the bottom line: the more we open our hearts to Jesus, the less room there will be for the devil to find any room in our hearts. In fact, Jesus wants to help us crowd out the evil one so thoroughly that he will have no influence at all on our lives.

B. Actually, I'm glad Sister Janet, so long ago, put her finger on my problem. And with you I pray that the Lord will continue to touch my soul and yours so that we may be free of bad influences and instead be true followers of Jesus as active members of his Church, who bear witness to our friends and loved ones of the power of Jesus' love.

C. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!