

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus and his followers went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the Sabbath came Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.

In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit, and it shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it meant. 'Here is a teaching that is new' they said, 'and with authority behind it: he gives an order even to unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

(Mark 1:21-28)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the ancient world, many forms of mental illness were attributed to being possessed by 'evil spirits'.
- In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is often presented in confrontational situations with evil spirits, with the Jewish authorities and even with his own disciples when they fail to understand who he is and what his mission entails.
- This text shows that where absolute good is, evil cannot remain.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This is the first of the miracles of Jesus recounted in Mark's Gospel and it is a significant introduction to the person of Jesus and the power he possesses. Only a few verses earlier, at his baptism, Jesus had been revealed as the beloved Son of God. In this short text, Mark contrasts Jesus and the authority of his teaching with that of the scribes. Jesus teaches in such a way that he makes a deep impression on his hearers. Clearly, this is because his authority and his wisdom come from God. While his human audience may still be unclear as to the true identity of Jesus, this is not the case with his 'other-worldly' audience: the unclean spirits know exactly who Jesus is—the Holy One of God—and they recognise his authority and obey his command. They know that the power of the Almighty is greater than the power of the evil one.

- In what ways today do we see evidence of the 'power of evil'? How are people held captive by this power in our world?
- In what ways can we speak and act with the spirit of Jesus against the evil we encounter?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?' What does Jesus want of you at this point in your life?
- 'I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' Is it difficult for you to make this claim? Who do you think Jesus is?
- Recall someone who made a deep impression on you. What were the qualities of that person that so impressed and drew you to them? Was there a quiet authority? Was it a charismatic presence? Share your recollections and reflection with others.
- Jesus challenged the evil that oppressed people in his time. This week, speak out, publicly or privately, against oppression or an evil in our world. Confront evil at all levels this week, wherever you may encounter it. Become part of lifting the burden from others.
- Use today's entrance antiphon as your prayer this week:
Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, to give thanks to your holy name and make it our glory to praise you.

