

**Understanding Demons**    Second Week in Ordinary Time    Friday, January 19, 2018  
7:30 PM    1 Sm 24:3-21;    **Mk 3:13-19**    (Healing Mass)    (Jesus did not come into the world to take away all our problems. He came into the world to transform us, which is a deep radical change.)

**“He appointed Twelve, whom he also named Apostles, that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”**

This is a call of the apostles and therefore the beginning of the Church. There are three basic purposes for which Jesus called apostles: first, to be with him; secondly, to send them out to preach; and thirdly, to drive out demons. Of the three **the one people understand the least is the last one: to drive out demons**. Some modern people think that demons are simply a metaphor for mental illness. Well demons are definitely an aspect of illness, but they are not a metaphor for all mental illnesses but, rather, a certain kind, and it’s not really just an illness. Other people think demons are actually creatures of God like angels, fallen angels, rebellious spirits. That isn’t what demons are either.

**To understand what a demon is we have to understand who we are.** We are the images and the likenesses of God, and as such **we have tremendous creative power that we can use for good or evil**. Now what **a demon is, is the creation of people**. It has two different levels. There are **collective demons** that exist in cultures or societies or groups or nationalities that empower a certain kind of living, a certain way of living, a certain kind of life, and like all demons they enslave those who create them. On a personal level some people produce demons often as a result of trauma or abuse or fear or profound insecurity, and these **personal demons can also trap them and enslave them**.

Now of the two the more important is actually the **collective**; it is associated for example with **idolatry**. St. Paul says that the gentiles worship demons. What he means by that is this: when people carve images and then they imbue those images with divine power, which is really within them because we are made in the image and likeness of God, and **we take that gift of God within us and we project it onto an image**, we give away our power. And these beings take on a life of their own, and that’s why **when we study mythology we study about the characteristics of these different demons**. Mars is warlike, imperialistic, conquering, and he was a favorite demon of the Roman Empire that was militaristic, imperialistic, and conquering.

Now these demons never have actually good qualities; **they are always based on some sort of fundamental turning away from God**. But they don’t only exist in the ancient world; they exist in the present world. For example **Nazism** was a kind of a demon produced by the collective of followers of Adolf Hitler. **Communism** is a kind of demon that was produced by the Russian people in response to all kinds of problems, political and economic insecurities and inequalities and oppression and enslavement and all kinds of things. But following a particular line of ideology they produced a demon that then enslaved them. **So ideologies or idolatries produce demons; actually it’s the people who follow them that produce the demons**. **Racism** is a demon; it enslaves those who have created it generation after generation after generation, and **it can seek to extend its power**. So if Jesus had not given his apostles the authority to drive out demons, he might have just forgotten the whole program of helping the world, because **the world needs**

**deliverance from evil, the evil that we have created, that we have projected** because of our insecurities or our fears or our pride or our evil desires or whatever.

Now on a personal level psychiatrists talk about **psychopathological complexes** that are semi-autonomous. Semi-autonomous means that they have a life almost on their own. Well they can talk that way; the truth is **they can be completely autonomous**, and they cannot only **enslave, they can even possess the person who created them or someone else in the family line or someone who is under the influence of that person.**

So they are a great nuisance, and the world needs freedom from them. And **the only way to be free from this kind of evil is to turn to God, which is the whole idea of the preaching.** What was the preaching? It was the message that the kingdom of God, **the power of God is really at hand; it's available right now**, not in a year or two years or three years or in some future date, but now. Now is the time. Here is the power of God. **But you must repent. You have to change.** The Greek word means **"take on a new way of thinking."** The Hebrew word means **"you have to turn around."** Both involve **conversion, change, radical newness, and ultimately on every level: thinking, feeling, acting.**

Now the truth is **many people suffer, but they really don't want to change.** They suffer from all kinds of darkness. They suffer from all kinds of ignorance. They suffer from all kinds of oppression. They suffer from all kinds of obsession, but they really don't want to change. They would like someone to take all their problems away, but that is not what salvation is about. **Jesus did not come into the world to take away all our problems. He came into the world to transform us, which is a deep radical change.** And if by the way anything that occurs in our lives forces us to really look deep and to question profoundly and to become more willing to do things differently, that is a gift, even if it's painful. And sometimes the greatest gifts are very painful, but **without the pain we might not ever achieve the willingness to change.** Human beings seem to be prone to comfort and being comfortable and staying comfortable and not moving beyond a certain level of comfort.

So this gospel is told to us for two reasons: number one, because **Mark knows very well that those who listen to this gospel are those to whom the apostles are sent to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.** But not only that, **Mark also knows that everyone to whom the apostles are sent are also called on to share in the mission of the apostles and to become apostles themselves.** "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift." And if we took that sort of idea really seriously, it would make our lives topsy-turvy, but sometimes topsy-turvy is good. **Sometimes having our normal way of life interrupted is good, because ultimately we are creatures of habit**, and if we are going to have good habits, we have to start some time. So this gospel is given to us that we can take, not comfort, but **hope that the work of God that we know is already begun will eventually find its completion. But it is foolish for us to hope if we are not willing to work along with God's grace.**