

4th Sunday
1/28/2024

IN EVERY LITTLE WAY

The gospel recounts an event dramatic and intriguing. Jesus frees a possessed man and that unclean is the only one who knows who Jesus truly is. This gospel tells us three things.

ONE—Evil is real. Evil can take a hold of people. While dramatic possessions happen, evil can work in ways less dramatic, more subtle and sometimes more dangerous. We speak of following Jesus in every little way based on the little way of St. Therese. That can sound quaint, trite or maybe even sentimental but there's something else at work. Evil disposes us to more evil just as goodness disposes us to more goodness.

Evil can be at work in every little way, so we strive for goodness in every little way. Something like resentment, can be nurtured into gossip and hatred and then it can develop into action, perhaps even into violence. When we let go of a resentment, when we strive to forgive, when we do good even in a little way, we can work against evil and grow in goodness. In each of our lives we can find examples of this at work...times when we let a little thing grow and fester into a big thing. It can start out small and morph into something dangerous.

TWO—God is more powerful than evil. Yes evil is real. Evil has a source in an evil one but as Jesus demonstrates, God's love is more powerful than the hatred called evil. The evil one wants us to never think about him or to always think about him—both of these are dangerous. Our primary focus is always to be on God. But while we must be cautious with evil but we must be even more confident in the power of God which Jesus shows us is more powerful than evil.

THREE—Jesus acts with authority but his authority is at the service of others and the good. That leads us to ask, how do we use the authority given to us? As a parent, as an employer, as teacher, as a coach, as a priest. Does my authority work to build up others or to tear them down? Does that authority serve others or myself?

Evil is real. God is more powerful. Jesus' authority is directed to service. Jesus comes to lead us to new life. We enter into that new life through baptism, which is to say the mystery of the Cross or we don't enter it at all. The whole Gospel of Mark is an education in the way of a crucified and ultimate, risen messiah. The disciples had to learn who Jesus really was and had to unlearn some of their previous expectations.

Here in the Eucharist, we celebrate the triumph of the cross. Here we enter into the saving hour of Jesus' death and resurrection. Here we realize that new life exists on the other side of the cross. In the Eucharist, Jesus continues his work of service. Here we continue to celebrate his triumph over evil and here with true authority gives himself to us.

Today's gospel tells us about Jesus, he acts with authority. It tells us about evil. It is real and it tell us about ourselves that we can misunderstand things. Evil can be dramatic but it can also work in ordinary but insidious ways. Most importantly, the gospel tells us that the authority of Jesus is stronger than the power of evil and that in him we find not only authority but goodness and life. And from the Eucharist, we go forth striving to live lives of intentional faith, lives of intentional goodness in big ways and in every *little way*.