

Homily of Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

In the Gospel, the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching for he taught as one having authority. It is our prayer that the pope and church leaders may teach the Good News with authority. We pray that the spirit of cowardice be far removed from them, and that they may be filled with the spirit of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7). We pray, as stated in the first reading that God may put his words in the mouth of the church leaders, so that they will preach as God commanded. We pray for ourselves, that we may retain the authority God gave us over our responsibilities. We pray that no one is authoritarian over his or her responsibilities.

In the Gospel, Jesus healed a man possessed by an unclean spirit. We are all unclean in one way or another. Our sins, weaknesses and afflictions make us unclean. For that reason, we all need healing from Jesus.

In the second reading St. Paul appeals to us, "Brothers and sisters, I should like you to be free of anxieties." St. Paul makes this appeal because many of us are made unclean by anxiety. In our case, the situation Hurricane Harvey left us is a major source of anxiety. There are other uncertainties. For instance, there are people who are anxious about their health; there are those anxious about their job; there are those anxious about what to eat and what to drink; there are those anxious about their status, there are those anxious about family issues; there are those anxious about their relationship; there are those anxious about their future; and so on. We are encouraged to bring our anxieties to Jesus who has the highest authority, and who has the last say.

Anxiety is part of life. No one is exempt from anxiety. However, there is a difference between how a person who has no faith manages anxiety, and how a Christian who trusts God manages anxiety. A person who has no faith lacks spiritual guidance and spiritual energy from God. That is why, some persons in their anxiety, since they do not have God to hold on to, they find something else to hold on to. That is why, too, some people get entangled in addictions of all kinds, or get involved in certain harmful behaviors. This is because, not only that they are controlled by their anxiety, they are also controlled by whatever they are holding on to. They become very unclean. A person who trusts God presents the issue of concern to God in prayer. By trusting God and believing in his divine will, God takes over the situation and shows a way out. This spiritual way of handling anxiety is very effective.

When the people of Israel were between the Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, they cried to Moses in fear and despair. Moses said to them, "Do not fear, stand your ground and see the victory the Lord will win for you today.

For these Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still" (Exodus 14: 13-14). God says through the psalmist, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

The psalmist encourages us, "Commit your way to the Lord, put your trust in him and let him act" (Psalm 37:5). "Place your burden on the Lord; he will sustain you for he will never allow the upright to fall" (Psalm 54:23). Jesus says, "Which of you for all his worrying can make himself a little taller" (Luke 12:25). And 1 Peter 5:7 admonishes us, "Place all your worries on him, since he takes care of you."

If we spend more time in praying than worrying, a lot of miracles will happen. That is why someone says, "Why worry when you can pray." Bobby McFerrin says that if you worry when you have trouble you make it double. Most of what we worry about never happens. You can imagine how much time we waste in worrying. One of the negative effects of worrying is that they make us lose our authority over our responsibilities.

Today, we bring every uncleanness to Jesus to heal. May we experience the healing power of Jesus. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP