

Homily of Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28

The first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy is a compilation of teachings, directives, and instructions from Moses, and God's laws in the previous books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers) that were to guide the people of Israel as they journey to the Promised Land and when they arrive at and settle in the Promised Land. The Book of Deuteronomy is referred to as "second law" or "copy of the law" (Greek: *deuteros* – second + *nomos* – law).

In Deuteronomy 18:9 and 14 Moses instructs the people, "When you come into the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abominations of the nations there." "Although these nations whom you are about to dispossess listen to their soothsayers and diviners, the Lord, your God, will not permit you to do so."

In the first reading, Deuteronomy 18:19, Moses spoke to the people what God said to him: "And the Lord said to me... 'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all I command him. Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.'" Scripture scholars explain that this statement was a prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus arrived, and during his transfiguration, God declared, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him" (Luke 9:35).

We are reminded today "not to learn to imitate the abominations of the nations" accepted and practiced in our world, promoted and amplified by godless and Christ-less "soothsayers and diviners" in the form of institutions, groups, cultures, politics, economies, psychologies, philosophies, religions, beliefs, theories, ideologies, and so on.

Further, the first reading warns Christians and, particularly Catholic prophets, "But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die" (Deuteronomy 18:20). We can interpret this death to mean more a spiritual death than physical death whereby the Spirit of God leaves the prophet. The prophet is occupied by unclean spirits like the man in the Gospel reading of today.

Perhaps, we have accepted and we practice "abominations of nations" and listen to godless and Christ-less "soothsayers and diviners." Perhaps, we are no longer "members of Christ's Body and temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:15, 19). Perhaps, we have been overtaken by unclean spirits and we are spiritually dead. We are all invited to listen to Jesus, God's chosen Son; and surrender to his authority to deliver and save us. Jesus says of himself, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). He also says, "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock" (Matthew 7:24-25). May we have a taste, and a share, and experience the authority of Jesus.

The second reading (1 Corinthians 7:32-35), further, describes the way some Christians worship God and mammon at the same time. Some Christians are divided because they are like "a married man [who] is anxious about the things of the world, [and] how he may please his wife." Some Christians are like a married woman who "is anxious about the things of the world, [and] how she may please her husband." St. Paul maintains that our relationship with God should be like an "unmarried woman or a virgin [who] is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit." These analogies do not mean that St. Paul despises married life, nor do the analogies suggest that we should despise married life. The point St. Paul makes is that adherence to the Lord is to be without distraction (1 Corinthians 7:35).

To conclude, let us, again, ponder on the following questions: Have we followed the way of the godless and Christ-less abominations of the nations and listen to their soothsayers and diviners? Are we overtaken by unclean spirits, and so are spiritually dead? Do we have a distracted and divided relationship with God because of anxiousness and anxieties about the things of the world?

Whatever our shortcomings are, let us listen to Jesus, God's chosen Son, and surrender undividedly to his authority to deliver and save us.

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