

St. Mary of the Angels Sunday OT 4 B 1/28/18  
Deut. 18:15-20; I Cor. 7.32-35; Mark 1.21-28

My Brothers and Sisters,

I have never been to Washington to see the nation's Capitol, the home of our Senate and House of Representatives. But I have seen pictures of those august chambers. I would not say that those chambers are sacred, but they are hallowed, hallowed by great statesmen and stateswomen who, since 1859, have spoken eloquently and passionately about national and international issues. However, from time to time, the evil spirit has invaded those hallowed rooms and, with its customary strategy of fear, has caused division, damage and destruction to our nation. Surely, the Civil War was one such tragic moment.

Now, at this very moment of our history, it seems that the evil spirit has once again entered those hallowed rooms, causing confusion and chaos, and once again, has sown seeds of division among its members, damage for our nation, and the destruction of our truer values.

Does today's Gospel have anything to say to this situation?

Let us reflect. The synagogue was a sacred space and the Sabbath was a sacred time. Jesus entered that sacred space and in that sacred time to preach the Good News of salvation: that the Kingdom of God was appearing right now before them, bringing God's reign of justice and forgiveness, of peace and compassion.

But, the evil spirit had entered that sacred space too, perhaps unrecognized until Jesus proclaimed his message. Then the evil spirit reveals himself, and, in doing so, reveals that the synagogue, that sacred space, is now poisoned by his presence. According to the Jewish purity laws, anyone who comes near a possessed person is contaminated. And so he mocks Jesus, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God." What he scornfully implies is, "Surely, the Holy One of God is not so foolish and stupid as to allow himself to be made unholy by coming near him!" But, Jesus refuses to be constrained by the purity laws and meets the challenge. The Gospel tells us that Jesus says to the evil spirit, "Quiet! Come out of him." – a rather subdued translation of the Greek. What Jesus really says here is: "Shut up and get out!" This is Jesus teaching with authority. "Shut up and get out!" And the evil spirit departs.

So, who will drive the evil spirit out of Congress today? Of course, it presupposes, first, that someone there recognizes the presence and activity of the evil spirit. And, secondly, is willing to expose and challenge that spirit. Is there such a person?

That person will need vision, courage, and freedom.

First, Jesus came with his vision of bringing about the Kingdom of God, a kingdom, as I said, of justice and forgiveness, of peace and compassion. Are there any senators or representatives who have a similar vision for our country, who truly seek justice for all, want forgiveness for illegal immigrants, work for peace in our world, and have compassion on the weakest of our society?

Second, Jesus had the courage to cross the purity law boundary to confront the evil spirit. Are there any senators or representatives who have the courage to cross party line boundaries to bring about reasonable compromise for the common good?

And third, Jesus had the freedom to risk everything including his life. Eventually, as we know, hostility from religious leaders will bring him to the cross. Are there any senators or representatives free enough to risk, not their lives, but their careers, to speak up and do the right thing, the noble thing, for the good of our country?

But, we cannot just speak of vision, courage and freedom out there in Congress. We have to look at ourselves too. The evil spirit always wants to attack where the Spirit of God is strongest. In fact, attacks by the evil spirit prove (prove!) that God is very present. And, if the evil spirit doesn't attack, it could well mean that there is nothing worth attacking. That is a consoling truth to remember: The attacks of the evil spirit prove the worth of our nation. If Saint Mary of the Angels is truly a sacred place, (and I believe that it is!) then the evil spirit has to attack us too. So, we must be vigilant against losing our vision of being an inclusive and active Christian faith community. We must have the courage to keep going beyond our comfort zone to reach to others in need, and we must have the freedom to proclaim the Gospel of the reign of God by the words, choices and actions of our life.

The struggle between Jesus and Satan, that took place in a synagogue two thousand years ago, still takes place in hallowed and holy places today. So, let us now turn to Jesus, made present in this Eucharistic liturgy, to strengthen us for our struggle with Satan who seeks to invade our sacred space because we so strongly belong to God .

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