

The Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Demons.

Now, there's a modern-day concept, for you!

Demons?

No sooner than I read that word,
I was already considering the first or second reading
as the focus for this homily.

But then I remembered a movie trailer for horror flick.
Its tag line?

Everyone has their demons!

Everyone has their demons.
What's that mean?

In short, I think it means this:
There are forces at work
in the world *around* us
and the world *within* us
that block our way to God.

There are several to approach this matter:

We can think about these forces
and their connection to personal sins:
 Sin brings trouble into our life
 and that trouble seems to take on a life of its own.
 That's one way to think about the impact of evil
 on our life.

Here's another way to view the topic of evil:
 we can think about these forces
 as malicious powers beyond our control;

Or, thirdly, we can view the struggle with evil
in a philosophical way and see it as
as the consequence of the Fall of Adam and Eve,
leaving us all to live amid the ruins of a once beautiful garden.

There are a lot of ways to think about evil.

Regardless how you frame it,
there is little doubt that conflict and tension
are common themes in human life
and this is where evil first shows up
in our individual experiences.

We don't use the word "demon" to describe the experience.
We tend to use another word: "torn," as in "ripped."

We don't describe ourselves as "possessed," but we do say
that we're "torn" or "divided."

When it comes to trying to live in harmony
with God, other people and even ourselves,
almost everyone lives a divided life.

What do I mean by "a divided life?"

A divided life is what happens
when you have one foot at work, one foot at home
and the demands of both are tearing you apart.

A divided life is what happens
when God gives you vocation
but the world tells you to "just get a job."

A divided life happens when
communication in your marriage
gets replaced with Internet chat rooms...or worse.

A divided life happens when sickness or depression,
loneliness or addictions
drive a wedge between you
and the healing power of God.

* * *

A divided life is lethal to the life of the soul.
The reason is simple.
When we are inwardly or outwardly divided,
with faith on one side, despair on the other,
we begin to think that God has NOTHING TO DO WITH US.

And that's the voice of the demon talking!

Did you hear what the demon screams in today's reading:

“What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”

The destructive force
that Christ confronts in today’s gospel
is a demon that tries to convince that man in the synagogue
that the God who-loves-him-beyond-all-imagining
has nothing to do with him.

It seems to be a favorite past-time of demons.
They counteract our instinct to turn to God for help
at those times that we feel divided.

Today, the demon attempts to do this
by throwing a tantrum.

Apparently, when you move close to God,
the “screamin’ demon” gets all worked up.

It tries its best to shout down
other voices in our soul...
voices that God puts inside us
to help us bridge the tensions and divisions
that develop in the day-by-day pull and tug of life.

A divided life is an unsettled life.
And when life gets unsettled,
it's hard to pay attention to the voice of God.
The demon starts screamin
and distracts our attention from the voice of the Holy Spirit.

For example,
when division in your life
is a result of a sin you’ve committed,
there’s an inner voice called *Conscience*
that you need to start listening to.

When you feel divided because a decision needs to be made
and you don't know which way to go,
there's an inner voice called *Wisdom* to listen for.

When the issue involves an injustice,
the voice to attend is called *Resistance*.

When the issue involves sacrifice,
the inner voice is called *Resilience*.

In other words, God has something to say
about the forces that act upon us and within us.

And God provides an “inner voice”
to help us address those forces;

God provides an "inner voice"
to convey the healing we need
and the insight we long for.

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The demon, of course,
wants us to ignore the fact
that we do, *in fact*, have an inner voice.

The more we smother our inner voice
the louder the demon shouts and screams:

*“See, see! Didn’t I tell you?
Jesus of Nazareth wants nothing...nothing...to do with you!”*

Don’t believe the voice of the demon.
And don’t ignore what happens in today’s gospel
once the demon is expelled.

This is how it reads:

*The demon came out of the man
and all were amazed and said to one another,
“A new teaching from one with authority!”*

That’s the good news we need to hear and ponder.
We don’t need a movie poster telling us
that everyone has their demons.

What we need to know is that Christ
can *out shout* every of our demons
...and send them on their way!

He has that ability.
He has that power.
He has that authority.

So, give him the authority he’s due:

in your public life,
in your home life,
in your private life.

Give him authority over your life...
and, eventually,
Those screamin' demons
will pack their bags
and hit the road.