

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 14– 15, 2018, Cycle B**

The Gospel writer of Mark tells us: "Jesus summoned the twelve and began to send them out two by two and give them authority over unclean spirits." And we are told: "...they drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil those who were sick and cured them." In other words, Jesus' earliest disciples carried on Jesus' same mission of proclaiming God's Kingdom and making God's Kingdom real in the world.

Mark uses the phrase "unclean spirits" more than any other Biblical writer. In fact the phrase "unclean spirits" is quite rare outside Mark's Gospel. Authority over unclean spirits was very important for the writer of the Gospel of Mark; for the very first miracle Jesus performs in Mark is exorcising a demonic. Each of the four Gospel's first miracle is significant. Each evangelist employs Jesus' first miracle as a way to set the theme for his Gospel. For Mark, that theme is to vanquish and destroy the power of evil in the world. We have got to be careful not to get "hung up" on the words "authority over unclean spirits." Mark means so much more than just casting out demons from those people believed to be possessed.

Like everyone in his culture, Mark also presumed demons caused more than just possessed people. Among other things, demons are responsible for physical and psychological problems. Paralyzed or, mentally ill persons are possessed; they need an exorcist to rid them of their demons. If, for instance, you woke up this morning with a bad cold, we'd presume two or three demons had somehow invaded your body during the night.

So, if Mark tells us that Jesus' first miracle was ridding someone of a demon, he's also telling us that our task, as imitators of Jesus, is to rid this world of as much evil as we possibly can. So, Jesus sends out his disciples two by two to do just that: to rid the world of as much evil as they possibly can. And Mark tells us the disciples went off then and preached repentance.

In Mark's mind repentance was very much linked to deliverance from unclean spirits. Unclean spirits manifested themselves not only as illnesses of body and mind, but also as compulsive vices like cruelty, greed or pride. Indeed even communities and whole nations can fall prey to systems that obscure God's love or subvert the means to encounter God's love; systems as racism, sexism, prejudice, and discrimination, oppression of the poor!

Repentance from the "unclean spirits" that possessed the hearts of the people of the ancient northern Kingdom of Israel is just what Amos preached. Once he was on a roll, Amos accused the powerful and rich of placing less value on the poor than on a pair of sandals, even comparing wealthy women to pampered cows. (Think of how Amaziah, the priest's wife, must have reacted).

No wonder Amaziah, Bethel's high priest, wanted Amos out of Israel's shrine. This uncouth shepherd from Judah wasn't delivering the company message shrine prophets were expected to deliver. Amaziah tells Amos: "Off with you visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread by prophesying." But Amos reminds Amaziah that he is no professional court prophet, hired to conform to the party line. Amos said: "The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, 'Go prophesy to my people of Israel.'" In other words, I have been called and sent to live and speak God's word of justice – no matter what! Do what I can to cast out unclean spirits!

So too has Jesus called us to share in his ministry of having authority over unclean spirits - to rid the world of as much evil as we possibly can. Like Amos, we have no choice but to be faithful to our call, for it is God who calls us and sends us, as Jesus called and sent forth his Apostles.