

30. June 2021

“Liberated by the Gospel”

Mt 8:28-34

When he reached the territory of the Gadarenes on the other side, two demoniacs came towards him out of the tombs - they were so dangerously violent that nobody could use that path. Suddenly they shouted, 'What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the time?' Now some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding, and the devils pleaded with Jesus, 'If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.' And he said to them, 'Go then,' and they came out and made for the pigs; and at that the whole herd charged down the cliff into the lake and perished in the water. The herdsmen ran off and made for the city, where they told the whole story, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Suddenly the whole city set out to meet Jesus; and as soon as they saw him they implored him to leave their neighbourhood.

The existence of unclean spirits is a difficult subject, but one that we cannot avoid if we take our faith seriously.

How can such a possession occur? In the case described in the gospel, we do not know the details that led to such a condition in these two men.

But we can see that the problem of demonic possession or oppression still exists today. Satan and his demons are interested in exerting as much influence over souls as possible. By every possible means, he tries to lead man away from the way of God and into sin. If he does not succeed, he will try to hinder them as best he can in their walk with God.

Satan gains special influence over people who are involved in magic and occult practices. By such practices, man himself not infrequently gives access for the powers of darkness to exert their influence. The situation becomes even more difficult when a person persists in sin. But where the Devil can exert his power the most is when man consecrates himself directly to him and invokes his help. This can lead to concrete possessions, which means that the evil powers are constantly within the person and torment him.

But the encounter with Jesus is the turning point for these deplorable men. At first the demons still speak through them, rightly fearing the authority of Jesus. In fact, with the coming of the Lord judgement has also come for them (*cf. Jn 12:31*).

This does not only apply to the specific case of today's Gospel. Throughout all the centuries in which Christ has been proclaimed, people have been freed from demonic influence. The expulsion of unclean spirits is part of the missionary mandate that Jesus entrusted to the Church (*cf. Mk 16:17*) and from which she has not shied away. In paganism it was easy for demons to deceive people and sow fear. However, when the faith has not been properly accepted, there is a danger of returning to the old pagan practices. Then it can easily happen that demons, which had already been weakened or completely overthrown, once again gain more influence over people.

Unfortunately there are signs that point to this... When faith is lost or weakened and worldly, that spiritual force that keeps the demons within their bounds is lost.

An Irish priest and exorcist addressed his bishops some time ago, warning that demonic influences are increasing dramatically in his country. The same situation is being experienced in other countries, to the extent that the International Association of Exorcists has issued a "pastoral emergency appeal" because so many people are coming forward asking for exorcism.

A tragedy in Ireland! So many missionaries went out from this country to the whole world, and today it has become very dark. The same applies to many other countries.

The only thing that can help is a profound renewal of faith and the conversion of many people. When the light of faith spreads, the darkness must recede. We need a confessing Church, which does not neglect its mission to proclaim the Gospel to every creature (*cf. Mk 16:15*). The more worldly it becomes, the less the power of the Holy Spirit will work in it. Then it will be opening the doors to the powers of darkness, and the demons will no longer fear, but will appear more and more aggressively. This is not the way it should be!