

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 27-28, 2018

Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1Corinthians 7: 32-35; Mark 1: 21-28

Preacher: Gee Gee Micoli

In the gospel, we find Jesus in Capernaum, a lovely setting overlooking the Sea of Galilee, much like Canandaigua Lake in Western New York. In this first chapter of Mark, Jesus begins his public ministry, teaching “with authority” in the synagogue. When he casts out an unclean spirit, the people are astonished and amazed. Most of us have never witnessed such an event. Understanding this miracle may offer us a chance for making changes in our lives.

Saint Ignatius designed a powerful prayer technique in which we play the role of one of the characters in a Gospel account. Using this technique, we might imagine we are Jesus or one of the members of the congregation or we could be the individual with the unclean spirit. I must admit, I have never taken the role of an individual with an unclean spirit. I don't know why. Maybe I didn't see myself as being possessed or feeling the need for healing. The man with the unclean spirit may not have thought he needed healing either because he didn't ask Jesus for healing. Jesus did not appreciate the words the man spoke but he did recognize the goodness in this man and the power the unclean spirit had over him. Jesus saw this man worthy of his healing and love. Jesus loved him just as he loves all of us.

We can all admit that it is far easier to find a fault in another person than it is to see our own faults. Maybe we have lived with our shortcomings for such a long

time that we don't even recognize them any more. We have just absorbed them into our being and assumed they are who we are and accepted them.

Consequently, we don't recognize our need for healing. Unfortunately, these unaddressed faults distance us from Jesus. Fortunately, he still loves us and is waiting for us to find him and ask for guidance and forgiveness.

With the season of Lent only a few weeks away, maybe we should stop and think about what has power over us. What doesn't allow our goodness to shine? Or putting it another way, "What are our demons?" We all have them. So, what are those shortcomings that prevent us from getting along with people whose lives intersect ours?

Do we have habits that are destructive to our health and harm the bodies with which God has blessed us? Maybe an alcohol, drug, food or gambling addiction has been too great to overcome. Or maybe we have attitudes or a mindset that cause us to act in ways or say things that are unkind and are at odds with the furthering of God's kingdom here on earth.

Are we more willing to defend a position than consider what God has envisioned for us? Maybe our pride will not allow us to see another way. Maybe our desire to be right will not allow us to relinquish the control we so desperately desire.

Maybe our anger flares when anyone suggests that we might want to look at things differently. Our faith identifies the seven cardinal sins as: anger, envy, gluttony, greed, lust, pride and sloth. God is not in fear. God is love and God is waiting for us to knock and ask.

This miracle of casting out a demon is the first in a trilogy of three miracles of

healing in the beginning of the gospel of Mark. Next week, Peter's mother-in-law, who was almost dead, is healed and then got up and served the Lord. If we are almost dead due to our demons, we too can be healed and serve the Lord.

With Ash Wednesday fast approaching, maybe we can start soul searching and uncover those things that keep us from our Lord. Do our actions bring about the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, generosity, faithfulness and self-control? This is where God is and where we want to be. If we are not there, we can ask for help. Remember he said, "Ask and you shall receive." Casting out this demon may be a personal invitation from Jesus for a miracle in each of our lives.