

January 25, 2015 Unclean Spirits and the Effect of Holiness Homily

Brothers and sisters, in the history of the twentieth century there were few as influential as Lenin, one of the fathers of the Russian revolution and a fervent communist. Although his parents were Christian, Lenin himself hated religion. He held religious believers in contempt. Oddly, Lenin feared the power of holiness. "The purer the religion, the more dangerous", he wrote. The ones he truly feared and hated and later persecuted, were the saints. Lenin feared the authentic witness of Christians who expressed, in word and deed, their solidarity with the poor and downtrodden.

In today's gospel, Mark gives an account of the first day of Jesus' public ministry (1:21-28). It is the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus is teaching in a Capernaum synagogue, where the Jewish faithful gathered for prayer, readings and instruction in the law and the prophets. A man with an "unclean spirit" boldly interrupts Christ's teaching. The nearness of Christ is enough to agitate him. The man utters a desperate cry of rage and despair. The truth about Jesus' identity is known to him, and he addresses our Lord as the "Holy One of God" (Mk. 1:25). In doing so, he recognizes the holiness of Jesus.

To be holy is one and the same as belonging to God. It is noteworthy that in John's gospel, the Apostle Peter also refers to Jesus as the "Holy One of God" "We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:69). Evil has nothing in common with holiness! In a later chapter (Chapter three of St. Mark) Jesus heals a man with a withered hand, whereupon "The Pharisees went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him" (Mk 3:6). A deed of mercy by Our Blessed Lord does not go unpunished!

Let us now ask ourselves if the holiness of others brings out the unclean spirits in each one of us. One of the most revered figures of the last century was a holy religious, Mother Teresa. Even the secular world admired her for her work with the poor. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her apostolate to the poorest of the poor. There were, however, some exceptions. The late English journalist Christopher Hitchens, penned a particularly nasty book in which he attacked Mother Teresa's credibility as an advocate and friend of the poor. Even the book's title was morally offensive: "The Missionary Position". You might say that Mother Teresa got under his skin!

Do we admire the saints among us? Or do we, in secret, despise and ignore them. Do authentic witnesses to the Catholic faith make us uncomfortable? Do they expose our personal shortcomings? Do we harbor a wish that they stumble and fall? Do they bring out the demons in us all?

Amen