

01/28/18 4 B

-- During this liturgical year, our gospel readings are primarily from the gospel of Mark. And it's interesting that, today, we find out that Jesus' first public act of ministry in this gospel is an exorcism. He drives out unclean spirits from a troubled man.

-- When we hear that word "exorcism" I suspect most of us cringe. Those of us who are old enough may think of the 1974 movie *Exorcist*, the girl with the rotating head spewing bad words and a green substance.

-- And the first reaction of a priest, deacon or other minister when someone says there's a need for an exorcism is usually to claim that's above our pay grade. And that's true, if we only think of situations such as that presented in the movie of the same name.

-- Yet, the fact is, priests and deacons perform exorcisms quite often. I will for two young children this weekend before they are baptized. In the prayer of exorcism I pray *Set them free from original sin, make them temples of your glory, and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with them.*

-- Yes, we hear that term "original sin." It refers to the story of Adam and Eve. But it also teaches us a deep truth about ourselves: we are all touched by sin. Yes, we are created in God's image, but that image is scarred by sin—and none of us is exempt.

-- It also reminds us that evil is a reality in the world. In one sense, we don't need to be reminded of that. Surely, we all felt the power of evil on 9/11/2001. We saw it last fall when a man mowed down over 50 concert-goers from a room in a high-rise Las Vegas hotel.

-- And we could go on and on talking about the demons of the drug trade, human trafficking, suicide as a result of bullying, etc. But that evil is present in our own lives, in our inclination to sin. We need healing.

-- Jesus came to proclaim that evil will not have the last word. Jesus showed his authority over evil by casting out demons. And he shows us today that evil cannot tell us that our place is confined to the four walls

of a Church. We are called to proclaim Jesus' victory over evil everyywhere.

-- To do that, we have to confront evil in our world and in our daily lives. We can't "sugarcoat" evil. For example, we cannot tolerate racist speech which occurs under the pretext that "I'm not going to be politically correct."

-- We cannot buy the lie that the unborn baby in the womb is just a mass of cells that eventually may have the "potential" to evolve into a human. We cannot keep silent when people speak of foreigners as if they are something less than fully human.

-- Yes, evil still exists in the world and pulls at each and every one of us. That is not going to end anytime soon. It will exist in some form or another until Christ comes to redeem the world.

-- But, because Jesus came to earth and confronted evil, because Jesus even allowed the forces of evil to crucify him in his earthly body, and because Jesus overcame death in his resurrection, we know the final outcome.

-- Evil will not stand forever. Good will triumph. We are invited to share in Christ's final victory over evil.

-- In the meantime, while we are still here on earth, we are challenged to confront the evil in our world and within ourselves. We cannot be indifferent to the cries of those who are held back by forces of evil.

-- And we seek strength from Jesus Christ to face the evil within us and, with his help and the help of the sacraments, overcome it.

-- In the end, Jesus has final authority over all evil. May we rely on his power to overcome the evil we face, day by day.