

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time B 2021
Dt.18.15-20///1 Cor.7.32-35///Mark 1.21-28

→this past week...Bishop Bonnar had meetings with all of the priests in an effort to get to know us and also to lay out his vision, dreams and hopes for our diocese as he becomes familiar with us, his new surroundings, and all the responsibilities that come with being a new bishop.

→so as we were gathering for the meeting and waiting for it to start...I was standing there in a small group of priests just getting caught up with everyone....

→there were four of us standing there (wearing our masks...and somewhat distanced but close enough to talk among ourselves)

→[and] one of the priests...a good friend of mine was telling the two others about his experience of having Covid over the Christmas holiday and all that he went through...I was just standing there because I heard all of this previously...

→but nonetheless...he told his story of all the symptoms he had and how he was affected by being ill and [in the end] how he has totally recovered...returned to life and all his duties...and how all is back to normal...

→and as he did so...he gently reached out his one arm and ***gently*** touched the shoulder of the one of the priests standing there...who still had his coat on....

→immediately...the priest whose shoulder he had his hand on....said...very seriously...
“you touched me.”....

→somewhat startled...and thinking he was joking my friend removed his hand and said half-heartedly... “I’m sorry”...to which came the same serious response again... “ you touched me.”

→now totally surprised and dumbfounded...my friend said... “I’m not contagious...I am fully recovered and am over the virus... again I’m sorry”

→...to which...he turned and walked away he again said dead seriously “don’t touch me again”

→all of us dumbfounded turned to each other and my friend said... “what I do...”

PAUSE

→[now]--////-- that story and the story we hear about in today's gospel contains a certain similarity....

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→**because** ----- in both stories it appears there is person present with an "unclean spirit.”

→in the gospel story it is straightforward...a man with unclean spirit confronts Jesus...in the other case...it was assumed because my friend had been sick that he was to be avoided at all costs..

→and secondly...in both stories the **unclean spirit** is driven away from the person

→in the gospel...the spirit comes out of the man at the command of Christ...in the other case...like so many my friend was able to recover from being ill.

→and I have to say...as surprised as I was about what happened this week in that somewhat innocent exchange...I was reminded of Princess Diana when she did the unheard of...at that time.... and touched a person with AIDS...how everyone made the immediate conclusion that the Princess now had AIDS because she touched someone.

→fast forward to what we are dealing with today... and I would hope that the same doesn’t happen to us...

→no doubt we still need to be careful and cognizant about our actions and circumstances we might find ourselves in...where we go, who we come in contact with, but we are in serious trouble if we can't cautiously touch one another even if for the briefest of moments

→so how then.....are these two incidents related to you and me here and now...today in our lives

→well I believe...they relate to US...in the same ways that they relate to each other

→first of all, each one of us in this church, to some extent, has an unclean spirit in ourselves

→by that I mean....we all have something in each of us that keeps us from being the kind of person we would like to be...or the person we hope we are....

→we may, for example, have something in us that prevents us from loving...the way we would like to

→or...we may have something in us that keeps us from being as generous as we would like to be

→or...we may have something in us that keeps us from being as forgiving as we would like to be

→i.o.w....we **all have** some kind of an unclean spirit in each of us...

→and...just as Jesus drove out the unclean spirit from the man in the gospel...so too Jesus can drive out the unclean spirit from us

→and that happens each time that we are reconciled to one another, each time we are reconciled to the church and each time we are reconciled to the community

→ **reconciliation** is the way we drive away the unclean spirits of our lives...the way we push our sinfulness away...so to speak

→ yet...what is unfortunate, however, is that these days...most of us very often pay more attention and put more energy towards the unclean spirits in our lives rather than getting rid of them

→ how many of us continue to hold grudges towards others...

→ how often do we continue to ridicule others, and tear each other down because someone may not think the same we do, or believe the same things we do

→ how often we continue to remain angry with someone even after they have apologized to us or tried to make amends to us?

→ [you see] --/--many of us these days...are often consumed by the unclean spirits of our lives...and yet Christ once again today, as he does every Sunday...in fact as he does every day of our lives offers us the opportunity to get rid of the unclean spirits if we want to

→ Christ offers us a way to get rid of the unclean spirits of our lives

through our reconciliation with each other, and through our reconciliation with God and the Church.

→ Jesus wants to free us from whatever is keeping us from being as prayerful, as loving, as generous as we would like to be.....

[and so] the question is, or perhaps better, the challenge is....do we want to be free from our unclean spirits?

→ do we want to be free from our sinfulness?

→from whatever might bringing us down or holding us back.

→I know we certainly want to be free from this virus...but hopefully that also includes the perceived stigma [and fear] also associated with it....

PAUSE

→..[and so]...the message of today's readings is really an invitation.....for all of us to approach Jesus and to let him drive out from us the unclean spirit that is a part of us

to drive out from us our sinfulness

to drive out from us those attitudes and thoughts that prevent us from being the people we should be.....

→**that** is the invitation being offered to us [this day]

→the question remains....as to whether we are open to accepting this invitation to become clean or not....

and perhaps even more challenging is....what do we need to do...to prevent any of those unclean spirits from ever returning into our lives.....