

From the Pastor

January 29, 2012



4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Jesus said, ‘Quiet! Come out of him!’ The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.’” [Mark 1:25-27]

To help open the treasures of the revised Roman Missal, each week I'll give the history of and a reflection on the three Mass orations of that day, gleaned from the USCCB's website and *Essential Presidential Prayers and Texts* book. I'm truly amazed at the theological depth and powerful beauty of these three prayers; I hope you are, too!

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Collect

*Grant us, Lord our God,
that we may honor you with all our mind,
and love everyone in truth of heart.*

Today's Gospel records perhaps one of the most frightening rites - an Exorcism - it is also one of the most misunderstood and over-dramatized Catholic ritual, thanks to the modern media. Yet today's Collect is so serene and simple. It asks God to help us to love Him and our neighbor in sincerity and action. Perhaps this dichotomy was intended to remind us NOT to make our mission overly complex - or limited only to the extraordinary events of life! The Latin words 'rationabili affectu' - which are rendered in English as 'in truth of heart' - beckon us to be attentive to our 'gut feelings' - which we must always reflect on. For unlike the animals that react with pure instinct, we humans are able to enhance our instincts with logic and reason - and with God's revealed words, without which we cannot stay on track!

As you confront your own demons, and try to help those dealing with their own ungodly desires and inclinations, do you use human logic and reason AND God's revelation, which is found in Sacred Scripture and Church teachings? Or are you trying to combat evil alone, without God's help? If so, God help you!

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Prayer Over the Offerings

*O Lord, we bring to your altar these offerings
of our service: be pleased to receive them,
we pray, and transform them into
the Sacrament of our redemption.*

Your altar. During Mass, parents [and others!] often admonish children to “behave themselves” because they are in God's house. But are we 'grown-ups' fully attuned to what happens in this sacred place, at God's holy altar? Whatever we bring to a Catholic altar - we literally bring to Christ Himself! All the prayers we utter before, or vows we make before, or sacrificial gifts we offer before a Catholic altar - are offered to Christ! No wonder we bow before the altar, and the ordained ministers venerate it with a kiss at Mass! Are you aware of what is happening each time you stand before our altar, or when your gifts are brought to our altar, or when you or a loved one celebrates a Sacrament: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist or Anointing of the Sick before our altar, or when the bodies of our loved ones are honored before our altar?

This prayer asks Christ to receive EVERYTHING we bring to God's altar - and transform it into Himself! For the altar is the place of the ultimate exchange; at the altar, we offer back to God whatever He has entrusted to us: our service, our offerings, our very lives - which He receives and transforms into Himself! WOW!

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Prayer after Communion

*Nourished by these redeeming gifts, we pray,
O Lord, that through this help to eternal salvation
true faith may ever increase.*

Although we're not even halfway through winter, and the planting season is still far away, this oration already envisions how God will make new growth 'spring' up - in us - and through us - in the lives of others! The Eucharist is indeed a redeeming gift - and perhaps God's greatest dose of grace - but it does not work by magic. In order to be a fruitful gift, those who receive the Eucharist must be properly disposed, just as the soil must be prepared, nurtured, watered and weeded if the seeds planted in it are to develop and blossom. With Lent almost upon us, it's the perfect time to assess the 'garden' of our soul. What things contrary to the Gospel must you uproot? Are you lacking the prayer time, sacramental grace or biblical knowledge necessary to fortify your faith?

With God's love and my prayers,

Father Mike

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