

AUTHORITY OVER UNCLEAN SPIRITS

Is the Devil real or is he/she a figment of our imagination? Let me tell us a story.

On the 5th of April 2023, Sony Pictures released a movie that touched the core of everyone – **The Pope's Exorcist**, adapted from a book written by an exorcist for the Diocese of Rome. Fr Gabriele Amorth was an Italian Catholic priest of the Society of St Paul (Paulines) and an exorcist for the Diocese of Rome for many years. In 1990, he wrote a book – **An Exorcist Tells His Story**, detailing the physical, spiritual, and psychological battles exorcists go through with Satan to relieve his grip on people. One of such battles is the focal point of the movie – **The Pope's Exorcist**. When the Pope learnt that an American family had travelled to Spain to take possession of an old Spanish Abbey which their father had bought before meeting his death in a car accident, and that the youngest son – Henry, who was in the car with him had been behaving strangely afterwards, he asked Fr Gabriele Amorth to investigate it. When Fr Amorth arrived, he enlisted the help of the local parish priest - Father Tomas Esquibel, and both had tough time in trying to exorcise Henry. During that exorcism, the devil who had taken possession of Henry, taunted the two Catholic priests and used their past infidelities against them. When Fr Amorth found out through his investigation that the evil spirit that had taken possession of Henry was Asmodeus, they had to confess their sins to each other to be in the state of grace to carry out the exorcism. When they did, the devil attacked them with their memories and failures, even to the point of telling Fr Amorth he wanted to destroy him personally. When Fr Amorth offered himself to be possessed, the devil left Henry, possessed Fr Amorth and wanted him to be his agent to infiltrate the Catholic Church and destroy her from within. With the help of Fr Esquibel, Fr Amorth was delivered of Asmodeus and the Spanish Abbey freed. This is a real-life story that informs us that the devil is real, he/she is still present today, and looking for vessels to use to destroy humanity and the Church. It is this presence of the devil in our world and of the superior authority he/she bows to, that we encounter in today's readings.

In today's Gospel pericope from Mark Chapter 1, we encounter the show-down between Jesus and the devil in the Synagogue. It is important to note the scene of this show-down – **The Synagogue**, which is a place of worship for the Jewish people, hence, a deeply spiritual place. Hence, **the first clue about evil spirits is that they are no respecter of holy places**. Wherever the children of are assembled, the devil and his/her cohorts are equally there. Mark tells us that in the synagogue, there was a man with *Pneumati Akatharto* – Impure/Filthy/Unclean/Dirty Spirit. This filthy spirit knew who Jesus was and yet had the audacity to challenge Him in the presence of everyone. This gives us **the second clue about evil spirits, they know who we are and what we have been up to**. However, Jesus was not ready they play their games nor exchange words with them, He only gave them the command to be quiet and exit the body of the possessed and they did. This gives us **the third and final clue about evil spirits - they can be overpowered but we need to know how**. It is equally important to note that not everyone can engage in exorcism; that was why Jesus' hearers were amazed and stated that he was different from their scribes. Why? While their scribes were experts in reading

and interpreting the Torah, they could not deal with real life situations that were bothering them; on the contrary, Christ spoke, taught, and acted with authority and dealt with real life situations they were going through. This singular encounter they had with Jesus, led to them spreading His fame abroad and to their believing that He was that prophet like Moses of the Old Testament, that God promised the Israelites in today's First Reading from the book of Deuteronomy Chapter 18. Yes, Jesus Christ is the New Moses but greater than Moses of the old because Moses prepared the way for Him and acted in His Name.

My friends, let us return to those three clues about the devil that we encountered in today's readings:

1. **The devil and their cohorts are no respecter of holy places.** Sometimes, people think that churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues, are holy places that the devil and their agents cannot frequent. In fact, the on place the devil and their agents target are holy places; little wonder Our Lady told the three visioners of Fatima to pray for Families and the Church, that if the devil succeeds in infiltrating these two institutions, the world would be in danger.
2. **The devil and their agents know a lot about us and what we have been up to.** Although God forgives and forgets our sins, the devil and their cohorts tend to use them against us especially if we had not confessed them adequately. They equally use the things we hold dear to attack us such as our health, business, affection, luxuries of life, desires and even death. However, their powers are very limited.
3. **The devil and their agents can be defeated by a higher authority.** According to Fr Amorth, there are things the devil and their cohorts fear, they include: people in the state of grace, people who are close to Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and people who forgive relentlessly. Let us be members of the above groups.

When I was in Southampton, a couple once asked me to visit and bless their flat since they were experiencing strange things there. I am not an exorcist, and I am not gifted in that field; however, when I got there, I felt a strange power. When I queried them on the things they were experiencing, they informed me that objects kept moving around their flat and they kept missing things. When I asked further what they had been up to, I discovered they had consulted a Tarot Card Reader some few weeks before our meeting and I told them to desist from that. One thing we fail to understand is that consulting fortune tellers, tarot card readers, diviners, reiki practitioners, and engaging in wheel of fortune tables, are some of the ways we open the floodgates to the devil and their agents. Let us desist from the above as they are not aligned with the Spirit of God. As today's Psalmist tells us – O that today we will listen to his voice, harden not your hearts. If you have the time, do watch The Pope Exorcist, and learn more from it.

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Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (28/01/2024)