

1st Day St. Anne Novena

The Cure of Demoniac

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Dt 18: 15-20

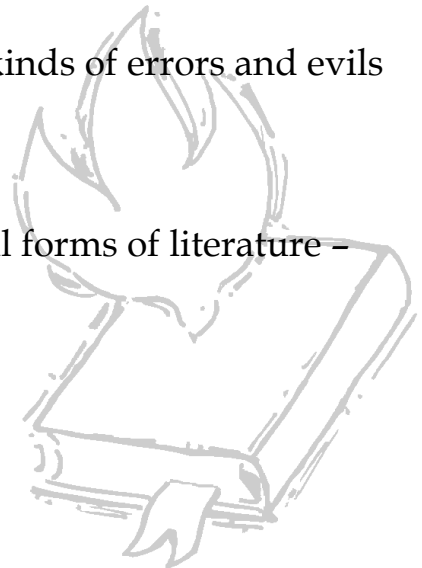
Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 7-9

Mt 1: 21-28

The miracle with which I start this Novena is not found in the Gospel of John. Instead, we focus on this reading from Mark's gospel for a specific reason. In the Gospel of Mark, there is a theme that very much defines this Novena, and sometimes about the malaise of the Catholic Church, especially in the last fifty years following Vatican II.

Prior to Vatican II (1962-1965), local Churches throughout the world were growing, the local Churches were prospering and all kinds of grace happened as a result. I am not saying that Vatican II was *bad*; rather, when some people of faith took the documents out of the bishops' hands and re-interpreted them according to what they wanted rather than what the bishops intended, then all kinds of errors and evils result from that re-interpretation.

This kind of re-interpretation takes place in all forms of literature –



once you take a writing out of the author's hands, then the reader looks at the text and fashions their own views that may be very different than the author's intention (this is why Jesus came down to earth, to explain what the Divine Author was trying to say to a group of so-called leaders that interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures differently).

At this Second Vatican Council, this "magisterium" (the group of bishops as a whole) tried to "open the window" of the faith to bring in fresh air but using a human analogy, if you do not put a screen in an open window, then you invite the bugs and all kinds of other evils to enter the house. As a result, those who interpreted the Vatican II writings badly interpreted the Council as an invitation to lessen the faith, to *not* attend church, to *not* go to Catholic schools, to live a life that was more conforming to the hedonistic desires of our society.

As a result of this bad interpretation, *less* children are being born, *less* people are coming to Church, and like all things in life, we reach the low point of our "ebbs and flows" of civilization – the Church had to experience the ebbs of life, as grave sins found new ways to enter this "modern Church" – this also is part of the "circle of life" we eventually

hit our low, and, as we begin to rekindle the faith within this Church, we begin to grow again.

The reason why this analogy of the “open window” is important for me, on which to focus, is because the theme in the Gospel of Mark calls upon a “Messianic Secret,” that the First Century men and women of faith could not understand. As many scholars of the bible have written about the gospel of Mark, the “insiders” of the faith acted like they were on the outside while those on the outside (Samaritans, Romans, Centurians and certainly Demons who possessed the faithful) easily have recognized.

In the theology of the “Messianic Secret,” those on the “inside” in Mark’s gospel could not see Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, as the new King David about whom Moses prophesizes in the today’s reading from Deuteronomy. In the book of Deuteronomy, we learn how even Moses, had fallen from the Lord’s graces because of his doubt in reaching the Promised Land. Because Moses doubted God, he was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land (of the original 600,000 men who left the land of Egypt, only *two* of them stayed faithful and were

allowed to enter Caanan – Joshua and Caleb). In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses warns the chosen people, that they would prosper for a while, but because of their disobedience to God, they would lose their land. Old Testament Scholar Lawrence Boadt, offered this summary theme of what Moses said: “Infidelity to the covenant, as given through Moses, would lead to disaster and destruction.”

As we learn in scripture, this prophesy was exactly what happened to the Chosen People. Because the “Chosen People” were not faithful to God, eventually, they were exiled out of the Promised Land (the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC). After the exile, fifty years passed when a “frenemy” named Cyrus the Persian permitted the Chosen People the return back to their home.

Similar to what happened in the Old Testament, we, too, have kind of turned away from God as a collective society. We have kind of become more secularized. The largest demographic growing in the United States are the unchurched, the people who do not believe in God. We call them the “Nones,” N O N E S, who believe in *nothing*. In today’s age, many are returning now to Church because people realize that with nothing in

life, we lose our ethical compass, our moral base and we lose a sense of hope. Without God to lead us, we lose our purpose, and then we lose all belief that there is good yet to come.

This “curing of the demoniac” in today’s gospel tells us that the ones who knew that Jesus was the Christ were the evil ones, were the ones possessed by the evil spirits, because the evil spirits of the world have dedicated their lives to leading us away from God and preference to the way of sin, that slow, gradual slope depicted in CS Lewis’ book, The Screwtape Letters. In his book, Lewis describes the road to hell as a nice, easy ride that one takes by not following God, by not believing in miracles, by not embracing the warning of Moses, and then, by the time a man or woman realizes what has been done to them, they are at a point of no return.

In Mark’s gospel, the encounter with this “Secret Messiah” is one that Jesus does not want anyone to know, because his true purpose for living was revealed through his dying on the cross. For those who encountered the love of this “Secret Messiah,” the cured realized the power that God possesses on earth, that God can heal, that God can love, and that God

can get us to heaven if we realize the power of what took place on that cross and allow God to carry us to the other side. We learn in Mark's gospel that if we hold on to him, that God's hand will lead us to heaven.

We also learn in Mark's gospel that many do not want to hold God's hand but prefer their own - even in today's age many in the world prefer to make themselves a type of "god" whose hand gently is held by those demons that lead many the other direction. For some reason, maybe because we can comprehend the ways of the world that we prefer the god of the world and prefer to have things the way we want them instead of saying, "Thy will be done."

The greatest challenge facing us in life is to follow what God tells us to do and not the "gods" of the world; for whatever reason, many of us prefer to follow our will instead of God, making ourselves a kind of "little god" that guarantees our place in hell if we do not change our lives.

Look at the result of these little "gods" of the world that result in man-made wars, diseases, death and destruction that Lawrence Boadt theorized would happen in the Old Testament story. By turning away

from God, we lose a sense of hope, which is what the gods of the world want us to do – losing hope attaches us even more to a world that is so focused on hate rather than love that the world ends up destroying itself. Rather, if we focus on God and God’s love, no matter what happens to us in the world, no matter what evils of the world fall upon us, no matter how much Satan tries to enter our hearts (and this will happen to each of us), if we turn away from sin and have faith in God to carry us to the other side, then we avoid what theologians call “the second death,” namely the death of the soul.

We also learn in this bible story that even if we are not healed on earth, even if we are not a recipient of a physical miracle that has taken place so often through the veneration of relics like that of St. Anne, we are the recipient of spiritual miracles every moment of our life when God is with us. Sometimes people say to me, “Father, because I have not received answers to my prayers, because God has not cured my sicknesses or illnesses, I have lost my faith in God.” In reality, no matter how many people are cured of the demoniac, no matter how many people are cured by Jesus in the scriptures, every single one of them

eventually died. God's purpose in coming down from heaven was not for the physical healing – that is incidental. God came on earth to show us that if we have faith, the miracle that awaits us is eternal life in heaven and that we avoid the “second death.”

The question we really need to ask is whether we embrace these miracles as a sign of God's power. Do we embrace the true reason or sign that God came down to earth, or do we wish to “bury” that Messianic Secret so we cannot recognize God at all? The demons obviously know who Jesus was and who God is – why can they see this and we cannot.

For this reason, we celebrate this Mass our today, and that is why a good number of people stay with us, the few number of people who at this Novena “get it,” who open their hearts to God. For those who believe, their hearts are not closed and hopefully our hearts are not closed either; their hearts are not hardened, our hearts are not hardened and that all of us reveal this Messianic Secret that has been hidden in broad daylight.

When we embrace God and embrace love, all kinds of things can

happen, which I why I continue to celebrate these Online and In-Church Masses. I celebrate these Masses for you and your intentions, to tell you that I have not forgotten about you, that God nor the Church has forgotten about you, that the entire Communion of Saints is trying to “work” through me (liturgy = “the work of the Church”), to take care of you no matter who you are.

In these Border Town parishes, in these “Periphery Churches” (as Pope Francis might have called us), these “hidden gems” of the Joliet Diocese, in these small little communities that no one pays attention (except God), those of the faith have seen this secret revealed and fill our Churches as a result of that faith; the people who understand are few but their faith is enormous. That is why, I really believe in my heart, that I was called to be here with you, because I want to make sure you know that someone cares for you, namely God, through me, and the miracle is happening *right now*, even though many people do not see this “secret” revealed.

God bless you for staying with us. God bless you for joining us in this Novena. God bless you for being you, embracing your life as a child of

God, as we can allow God to pass through you and pass through me, so that we can reveal this secret and offer this miracle of faith to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.