Monday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 5:1-20): Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!" (He had been saying to him, "Unclean spirit, come out of the man!") He asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "Legion is my name. There are many of us." And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory.

Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, "Send us into the swine. Let us enter them." And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. The swineherds ran away and reported the incident in the town and throughout the countryside. And people came out to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear. Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what had happened to the possessed man and to the swine. Then they began to beg him to leave their district.

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him. But he would not permit him but told him instead, "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you." Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

“Unclean spirit, come out of the man!”

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Today we find a fragment of the Gospel that can make more than one person smile. To imagine two thousand pigs rushing down the mountain is a somewhat comical image. But the truth is that those swineherds were not amused at all, they became very angry and asked Jesus to leave their territory.

The attitude of the swineherds, although humanly it may seem logical, is frankly reprehensible: they would rather have saved their pigs than healed the demoniac. In other words, they would rather have preferred material goods, which provide us with money and well-being, than the dignified life of a man who is not one of “ours.” Because the one who was possessed by an evil spirit was only a person who “night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides…was always crying out and bruising himself with stones” (Mk 5:5).

We often have this danger of clinging to what is ours, and despairing when we lose what is only material. Thus, for example, a farmer despairs when he loses a harvest even when it is insured, or a stock market player does the same when his shares lose part of their value. On the other hand, very few people despair when they see the hunger or precariousness of so many human beings, some of whom live alongside us.

Jesus always put people first, even before the laws and the powerful of his time. But we, too often, think only of ourselves and of what we believe will bring us happiness, although selfishness never brings happiness. As the Brazilian Bishop Helder Camara would say: “Selfishness is the deepest root of all unhappiness. Your own and that of the whole world.”

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “It is as if Jesus said: Get out of my house, what are you doing in my home? I wish to enter: Come out of this man, of this abode prepared for me.” (Saint Clement of Rome)

- “Christian is someone who has a a deep desire within him: to meet his Lord with his brothers and sisters.. This is our happiness.” (Francis)

- “Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us - that is, charity - necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament

of reconciliation.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, № 1856)