

## THE POWER OF JESUS AT WORK: 4TH SUNDAY B

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A lovely line in the Book of Psalms says: *'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord'* (33:5). It certainly is. The crops keep producing food for our tables. The summer heat gives way to cooling autumn breezes. Most diseases are now curable. Tyrants are sometimes overthrown. Social reforms like pensions for the needy are here to stay. Conflicts end in reconciliation. Shaky marriages get patched up. Love survives misunderstandings, thoughtlessness, insults and indifference. Wars come to an end. Enemies become friends. We forgive others and are forgiven. Sport keeps contributing to what is good, decent, and noble about human beings. A striking example of exceptional goodness is a prayer scrawled on a piece of wrapping paper found at the Nazi Concentration Camp at Ravensbruck:

*Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will but all those of ill-will. Do not only remember the suffering they have subjected us to. Remember the fruits we brought forth thanks to this suffering – our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage and generosity, the greatness of heart that all of this inspired. And when they come to judgement, let all these fruits we have borne be their reward and their forgiveness. [A. de Mello]*

In short, there is goodness everywhere. But where there is goodness, there too is God and the Kingdom of God. So God's loving rule is still happening among us.

But so too is the anti-kingdom of evil. Its power and force keeps staring us in the face. Newspapers and news bulletins report it daily in its ugly manifestations. Our own consciences remind us of its hurtful and harmful influence. It has been reliably reported last week, for instance, that 1% of the world's population now owns half of the world's wealth. Too many persons work for less than a dollar a day, and others are denied health and safety protection. Random acts of terrorism are inflicted on defenceless people. Refugees exercising their legal rights to seek asylum are visited with systematic acts of cruelty as deterrents to others. Persons are being kidnapped and sold into slavery, including sexual degradation. Racism, consumerism, and devastation of the earth's natural resources are still raging round the world. In many places large segments of the population are involved in unrest and civil war. Violence is growing. Individuals, high on drugs, smash their targets to the ground. Bullying is everywhere. What we are facing, then, are both the evil acts of individuals and evil social structures.

In the days of Jesus on earth, people called different evil forces *'demons'*. Jesus himself recognised one super-force behind them all. He named it *'the EVIL ONE'* - also known in his day as *'the Devil'*, *'Lucifer'*, *'the Enemy'*, and *'Beelzebub'*. Today's gospel is a striking example of his confrontation with, and victory over, the *'the Evil One'*. As the story has it, *'the Evil*

*One'* has taken possession of a deranged man, who interrupts Jesus as he teaches and challenges his power and authority over evil. Jesus does not answer the man's taunts, but addresses '*the Evil One*' sharply and directly: '*Be quiet! Come out of him!*' Throwing the sufferer into convulsions, and with a last loud and desperate scream, '*the Evil One*' wriggles out of him. At long last its victim is free from its torments.

More recently if less dramatically, followers of Jesus in a particular parish, acting with the power of the Spirit of Jesus, chased out evil from a disturbed man at Sunday Mass. From the back of the church he kept repeating the Mass parts after the priest, softly at first but gradually more loudly and belligerently, with profanities and mockery thrown in. Although the man was clearly irrational, some people began to feel offended and angry. Then something wonderful happened. At the Sign of Peace, a woman left her pew and extended her hand to the man. He took it, and then another person appeared behind the woman, then another. Soon dozens gathered to offer peace to the troubled intruder, and then the man began to weep openly. When he sat down, a small child, touched by his tears, climbed into his lap. The Mass continued and the poor man never spoke another word. [Alice Camille]

In the presence of Jesus, then, Evil did not, and does not, have the last word!

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