



## Blessed Trinity Catholic Community † Spirit of Christ Mission

**Fourth Sunday Winter Ordinary time – B – January 28, 2024**

**Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 95:1-2,6-7,7-9; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28**

**Homily – Fr. Ed Hislop**

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**S**aint Paul, from whom we just heard, can be understood in many and diverse ways, depending on whatever approach to life and faith one chooses to embrace. It could be that Paul, while naming presumed divisions of living in the world of his day, desiring that we “*be free of anxieties*,” is challenging us *not* to separate faith and life, or human relationship from relationship to God, whether that be family, husband, wife, or community—it is always “both/and.” The separation of life and faith is not truly adhering to the Lord; to do so imposes “restraint,” on believing.

The prophet, which we are all called to be and become, does not proclaim God’s word, compassion, or vision in isolation from the reality and demands of ordinary life, or apart from the dark struggles and terrors of the times. The true prophet, rather, stands in the middle of the world, in the middle of life, with all its weakness and strength, sin, and grace, and speaks of God—which is to speak of compassion, mercy, and faith with the call to engage in the real world in which all live—without “restraint;” it is to speak of the whole human family as one holy communion. This is the voice of God “anxiously” speaking through all the chaos, hope, struggle and darkness not of yesterday, but of today.

The prophetic word of God is not a voice from long ago, or from the ancient pages of the Old Testament, nor is it a word spoken only to individuals for their own personal edification. That kind of prophetic word imposes “restraint,” is safe, and is addressed to a world which no longer exists.

That is the hope of the unclean spirits of the day, like the one of which Matthew speaks: The falsehood that belief is only about individual relationship with God and not about relationship with the many, varied, and diverse families and neighbors. Those unclean spirits, so loud today, shout and scream: “*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth*,” you are from another time, another place—stay where you belong—with individual believers. *Restrain* yourself. Do not be anxious about the things of the world. You cannot speak to the nations, to the city or to a people. Do not

ask the world, the nation, or a community to change. And do not challenge the ways of the world today. Be silent when lies are told, when the innocent are killed and revenge becomes the order of the day. Do not embrace mercy or compassion or justice, do not forgive; do not be a prophet. Keep faith and life, relationships, and God separate and distinct from real life and the “unclean spirits” of the times. “Do not rock the boat” or challenge the way things are. “*Do not be anxious about the things of the world*.” There is nothing you can do.

Words we hear in many ways, day in and day out. The “unclean spirits” are loud: “*What have you to do with us?*” So loud and persistent that too often, too many walk away. But there is hope. Prophets still rise up “from our own kin.” We can all still be astonished at the teaching of Jesus today. Amazed that he walks through the middle of today’s anxious world where we must first discern his real presence and hear anew his teaching.

The “unclean spirits” cannot live with love. They cannot inhabit a holy communion where Truth is sought, spoken and heard; where life is cherished, revenge rejected, merciful justice sought; they cannot dwell in a house where compassion lives, and hatred is named. The unclean spirits are silenced when a holy communion sincerely bows in worship together again and again, anxious about *both* the things of the world and of the Lord, “without distraction.” Those “unclean spirits” are commanded to be “quiet” when God’s word is heard anew and song rises joyfully to the Lord, when nourishment is received and embraced for service and the “holy communion” goes forth to “love and serve.” The unclean spirits “convulse” when the rejected are welcomed, the homeless embraced, the hungry cared for and imposed restraints are lifted. The “unclean spirits” are ordered out when compassion welcomes and mercy restores. So loud in our world, those spirits will finally be commanded to be “Quiet!”

Then many will be amazed and ask, “What is this?” Who are these people? **“IF TODAY YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS.”**

