

Welcome, everyone, as we continue today with our series on giving an effective witness. Two weeks ago, I spoke about the role we play in spreading the gospel. It does not all rest on our shoulders; in fact, we are not the primary driver – God is. We must believe that God is at work in the lives and in the hearts of those around us, because if God is not at work, it won't matter what we do or how clever we are - we will not be successful in our mission. If He is at work, then all things are possible. And last week, I spoke about the extraordinary things God can do if we respond to what He has put on our hearts. Just as Jonah's preaching led to the conversion of an entire city, so our witness can lead to conversion and growth in discipleship.

In today's gospel, we see Jesus himself give quite an effective witness. We are told that there was a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue. You can imagine what that was like for the people, to be around such a person. It would not have been pleasant. This unclean spirit would have been disruptive to their worship, cruel to those around him, undercutting their efforts to live a holy life. And you can imagine what it was like for the man himself, to be plagued by this spirit, corrupting him, robbing him of peace, leading him to act in such a harmful way, making him an outcast. It would have been miserable, and any and all attempts to help him had apparently been futile.

And then Jesus walks into the room, looks at the man and says to the unclean spirit, "Quiet. Come out of him." And it obeyed. Jesus had an authority that others could

not claim, he could command even the unclean spirits, and they would obey him.

There was power in Jesus' words. He came in with authority, there was power in his words, and things changed.

But as marvelous as these miracles were – and they were marvelous – they were just the prelude. One could imagine Jesus saying, “Now that I have your attention, let me tell you why I'm here. No, it's not to cure the sick and cast out demons, as happy as I am to do that for you. I have something even better, so let me tell you the good news: I am here to show you the way to the Father. I am here to give you forgiveness for your sins. The message I bring is not just one of temporary healing; it is a message of eternal life.”

If Jesus' words had power when he healed the sick and cast out demons, then they had power when he said these words, when he touched the hearts of his listeners, when he healed the wounds of sin that marked their souls, when he entered into their darkness and lifted them up into the freedom of the light. That is a power that nothing can withstand; that is authority over all of creation.

And it is a power that he shares with us whenever we preach the gospel. Yes, we can tap into that kind of power. Jesus did not just want to touch the hearts of a handful of people in Israel two thousand years ago, and the rest of us are out of luck. He wants to touch the hearts of all peoples, of all times. So he said to us, in his last words before ascending to heaven, “go out to all the nations, share with them what I have

shared with you, and know that I will be right there with you, making sure your words have power.” We carry on his mission, we bring the power of his words to those around us, we touch their hearts with the good news of salvation.

But in order for that to happen, they have to hear it, which means we have to say it. It is good and necessary to pray that others will come to know Jesus, but Jesus has given us more to do than just pray. He has told us to give witness. He has told us to invite others to come to know him. He has told us to share our faith, not to hide it under a basket. So we do this first with our actions, and then with our words.

And let me say a little more about that. We give witness by our actions, most definitely. We feed the hungry, we reach out to the lonely, we show compassion to those who suffer. That will get their attention, it will grant us an audience. But we must not tell ourselves that our actions are enough, any more than we should tell ourselves that our words are enough. We need both. We have better news to share than just that they will have a meal or someone to talk to. The news we have to share is that they are loved to their innermost being by the creator of the universe, that He became one of us to die for their sins so that they could be forgiven, and that he has promised to come again to put an end to suffering and death once and for all. We share our faith with our actions and with our words.

Parents do this in a unique way with their children. It is a solemn duty to share the person of Jesus with these little human beings that have been entrusted to them, as

well as a great joy and great privilege, I'm sure. But it must be getting harder and harder to do that, as our culture becomes more and more secular. It is sadly not uncommon during marriage preparation classes for the couple to tell me that they plan to let their children make their own decision about what religion they will be, which makes me wonder if they recognize the value of their Catholic faith if they are not eager to share it with their children. Of course, we don't want to force our faith onto our children in an oppressive way that would lead them to reject it once they were adults, and we all must eventually embrace our faith for ourselves once we reach a certain age; but we must give our children a firm foundation so they can make that choice well, we must form them in the gospel and share with them the person of Jesus Christ.

Because they will most certainly hear other messages. Our children are being formed by something, so if not the gospel, than what? YouTube celebrities? Google? Common Core? These things aren't evil, of course, but they're not Jesus. They are not the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Which is why it is important that we support our Catholic schools, so that they can help us form our children in the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is power in Jesus' words. Let us not be afraid to share those words, whether with our children or those whom we serve, so that their lives can be transformed.