

Lent 3 (2025)

We all – well, nearly all – are fascinated with ‘things that go bump in the night’. Tales of the crypt abound. Cities with any age on them have ghost tours. Stories of demon possession and exorcisms sell books and are often hits at the box office.

Today’s Gospel is in this genre. Jesus restores a man who had a demon “who was dumb.”

Many commentators, expanding on this last bit, the demon being speechless, say that for the exorcists of that day getting a demon to reveal his name was absolutely essential for the rite to be performed. No name, no exorcism.

Jesus, apparently, had no such limitation, as we discover in today’s Gospel. He is more than a magician or wonderworker, He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Before I go further, allow me to offer a preliminary thought on the opening verses of today's passage. Here we find three responses to the miraculous sign Jesus performed that day.

The first was one of **amazement and glad acceptance**. In verse 14, we are told "people wondered." This response seems to have come from ordinary people.

Matthew's account says they were amazed and said: "Is not this the Son of David?" (Matthew 12:23) . . . meaning they recognize Him as the long-looked-for messiah. At last, the promised reign of God was breaking in. The Kingdom was in their midst.

Others, namely the Pharisees (again drawing from Matthew's Gospel), had a very different response. Theirs was one of outright **hostility and scurrilous slander**. They accused Him being in league with Beelzebub, the chief of the devils".

Still others were fence-sitters. Their response was one of **cynicism**. “**Show us a sign,**” they said.

These fence-sitters would get their sign. It would come when Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter morning. Yet, seeing is not always believing. Not all those who sought a sign became His followers.

There is such a thing as spiritual blindness. We see it in both the second and third camps. Don't be surprised or overwhelmed when you are confronted by it. Just keep living the Good News. Learn to be a Teflon Christian.

That is my preliminary point, but onto the main section of this Gospel. Here we find Jesus telling a story about an empty house and eight devils.

Where I grew up, there was a venerable hotel . . . the Edwards it was called. The

building turned 100 two years ago. But, sadly around 1967 it closed. The contents were auctioned, and the building lay empty for over 40 years.

As the years passed, windows were broken out and the building became a haunt of wild vermin, owls and tramps.

Happily, in 2009 it was completely renovated and reopened.

Where I am going with this? /// There is peril in leaving not only a building but the human soul empty. Un-inhabitation leads to infestation.

This is, of course, the point Jesus makes in the Parable of the Empty House.

The 'house' of which He spoke could well have referred to the Jewish nation. Over the years, there had been a number of reforming

movements. The reign of good King Josiah comes to mind. Josiah reigned in Jerusalem from 640 - 609 BC.

He cleansed the Temple of pagan worship and sought to reorder Judah's national life according to precepts found in a rediscovered book of the Law (likely Deuteronomy).

Did his reforms last? No. As it turned out, more than a reformation was needed.

What was ultimately needed was for God Himself to come and inhabit His people with His life-giving Spirit, to write the Law on their hearts.

This is what began to happen with the coming of Jesus.

He came to bring more than reform. He came to bring life to the full. That life remains available today. It can be yours.

The Christian life is more than a series of negations, a list of don'ts. Of course, it includes some of those because what we do with our minds and bodies matter. But we mustn't stop there. The void created by their negation must be filled.

This past week I made a hospice call. When I arrived, the gentleman I was visiting was sitting outside in the sun. During our visit, he said he wanted his life to count right up to the end.

We went on to talk about how he might accomplish that goal. He was limited in what he could do physically, but there were things he could do to make a difference.

I suggested that he spend some time both before getting up and after going to bed praying for his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

After all, there are so many voices out there seeking to lure them away from Christ and His Church. No greater work can be done than to claim them for Christ before they are claimed by MTV and the like.

More than that, I suggested he spend time with them, sharing his life experiences, listening to their concerns and encouraging them.

He resolved to do all that I had suggested. There is no reason for any of our 'houses' to be left empty. Issac Watts was right when he wrote:

Satan finds some mischief still.
For idle hands to do.

Consider your situation. Being a Christian doesn't end when we tick the box saying "I believe" or after we get rid of a few bad habits unworthy of a follower of Christ.

No, our lives must be filled with positive and productive things. Paul in today's Epistle points us in the right direction when he says "**walk in love.**" Later in the same Epistle he says **be light.** What might that look like in your life, in my life?

Living out our vocation as Christians doesn't just happen. It requires seeking direction from God day by day, doing things outside our comfort zone, practicing time management and above all drawing our strength from above.

Today's Gospel may be in the genre of the scary and paranormal. Even so, it is full of practical instruction.

Never forget: the devil is a real and formidable enemy . . . empty spaces are the devil's workshop . . . filled lives are victorious and productive lives. You have a vocation to fulfill. Move ahead with it!