

**Begin by asking what weekend is this? (Superbowl) and besides the game, what is most watched by viewers? (the commercials).**

**My favorite commercial is one advertising a brand of hot sauce. The camera focuses on this big brute of a guy who is sitting down in a torn pair of jeans and ripped sweat shirt. He takes the bottle of hot sauce and generously douses the pizza and then devours the pizza. As he is eating the pizza a mosquito buzzes around him, lands on his arm and bites him drawing out blood. The mosquito then begins to fly away and EXPLODES! What a great commercial!**

**Jesus would understand the thought pattern of why companies will pay millions of dollars to show creative advertisements during the Superbowl. It is just simply a good way to get out their message.**

**Today's gospel passage is taken from the first chapter of Mark's gospel. He has been baptized by John, the Baptist and is filled with the Spirit which has descended on him; then he goes into the desert and defeats the devil's plans for him. Now he goes to a synagogue in Capharnum to announce the Reign of God has come.**

**But why does he choose a synagogue? Because it was the teaching institution and that he can get his message out. In every town or village that there were ten men, the Jewish law insisted that they form a synagogue. There was no singing or ceremony in the synagogue. Just the reading of the Torah and reflection on its interpretation.**

**In the synagogue there were men in three positions:**

- 1. Ruler of the Synagogue: An administrator who organized the services**

2. Distributor of alms: One who collected a free will offering for the poor
3. Minister: took out and put back the Torah and other sacred scrolls.

There was NO permanent preacher or teacher. The leader of the synagogue would invite men to comment on the Torah (especially the commandments). The most well known of the commentators would be called scribes or rabbis (teachers of the Torah).

That is why Jesus comes to Synagogue to get his message out. (Give the example of Jesus going into the synagogue in Luke's gospel, reading from the scroll of Isaiah, the prophet, and then saying, "Today this passage is fulfilled in your hearing")

Jesus does not comment on the Torah like other scribes and rabbis. They would quote other famous rabbis to interpret the commandments. He teaches "with authority". He speaks from the heart and without quoting anyone else.

While he was preaching, there appears in the synagogue a man with an evil spirit.

The typical reaction in the day of Jesus would be to separate yourself from those possessed: they were unclean. By touching them you became unclean. In fact, in some instances, their presence in the synagogue made the synagogue itself unclean.

But Jesus is not like other rabbis; he chooses to approach the man possessed by the spirit and speaks to him.

He commands him to come out of him.

The evil spirit obeys.

**Other rabbis might perform a ritual to exorcize an evil spirit ( a form of exorcism) But NO ONE had ever commanded an evil spirit to immediately leave.**

**This is indeed a new teaching; this is indeed a new way of healing.**

**(Pause)**

**It is clear that in the day of Jesus the people believed in being possessed by the devil.**

**Today many people do not believe in devil possession; others do. As for myself, while many forms what people claim to be devil possession are really psychological and physical problems, I do wonder if certain human could not involve evil spirits.**

**(examples)**

- **Isis and beheading of captives**
- **Boka Rakam in northern Nigeria who have tortured and killed 2,000 people**
- **The financial greed which has led to the foreclosure of so many homes in Detroit.**
- **Crooked politicians**
- **Drug pushers**
- **People who are addicted**

**Are all these actions simply the sins of people or are other spirits involved?**

**Whatever we may believe, Jesus is intent in today's gospel of curing the man who thinks he is possessed. He has come to cure and bring us inner peace. His message is clear in word and deed. He has come to set us free.**

**He has come to unbind our hearts and souls from whatever holds our spirit down. Receive his healing**

**He has come to rid us of the evils which we often cooperate with which can choke our souls and bind our spirit.**

**And what can we do to experience the healing presence of Jesus?**

- 1. Come and pray for healing.**
- 2. Pray for forgiveness.**
- 3. Seek the wisdom of God through seeking understanding of Jesus' way of living**

**Recently while at a discussion with neighborhood young adult men who play basketball, I asked them what formed the core of Christian teaching. And while most of them claim to come from a Christian background, NO ONE mentioned Jesus as the basis of Christian faith. I was totally shocked at they did not understand that Jesus is basic to Christianity.**

**(pause)**

**Today's gospel proclaims that Jesus came to bring good news. A passage from Isaiah 55 puts into words well the spirit Jesus wanted to share at Capharnum that day.**

**(Isaiah 55:6 ff)**

**Seek the Lord while he may be found;**

**call on him while he is near.**

**7Let the wicked forsake their ways**

**and the unrighteous their thoughts.**

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

**8**“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,”  
declares the Lord.

**9**“As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

My brothers and sisters, learn to dance with the Lord Jesus,  
And you will never want to partner with evil.

*(Notes on the synagogue worship from The Gospel of Mark by William Barklay pp 29-37)*