

4B

Coming out of the railway station of a strange city, one day the famous **Bishop Fulton Sheen**, then Fr Sheen, stopped a small boy and asked him the way to the Cathedral.

The boy offered to walk with him and show him the way. But while walking, he decided to ask him a few questions:

Boy: *What's your name?*

FS: Fr Sheen

Boy: *And what are you going to the Cathedral for?*

FS: I'm going to talk to a lot of people there.

Boy: *And what are you going to talk about.*

FS: Oh, I'm going to tell them how to get to heaven.

You can't be serious, was the reply, *you don't even know the way to the Cathedral.*

Well, Jesus came to show us the way to heaven. He taught with conviction, unlike the Scribes who were just repeating pious platitudes. Even though He taught with authority Jesus was anything but authoritarian. But his words did carry weight because, when he gave orders to the unclean spirits, they were dislodged.

Anything which drags us down which is out of the ordinary could be described as a bad spirit or bad karma as some people call it. It is more than the winter blues or the odd bouts of melancholy which may affect us from time to time. Some people feel so bad about themselves that they want to end it all. They say that the biggest cause of death among young adults is suicide. That's a bit worrying.

Last Sunday Jesus invited us to repent and believe in the Good News. It's good news to know that whatever spirit is dragging us down and making our lives a misery, Jesus can free us from. The powers of darkness can bind us in different ways like bad memories, harmful addictions, excessive feeling of guilt, suicidal thoughts, fears or debilitating phobias, emotional

disorders, feeling bad about oneself and similar things. I am inclined to believe that these could be compared to the bad spirits which Jesus drove out of people. I notice on the paper yesterday, that Fr Pat Collins, who incidentally gave a mission here in 2003, recently told the Irish bishops that with the demise of the faith there was increasing evidence of the malicious activity of the Evil One. He, himself, is an exorcist.

Today Jesus drove out an unclean spirit. We often talk about people being clean when they are no longer slaves to addictions of one kind or another. The addictions themselves are only the symptoms of a deeper malaise going on in the soul of the person. As Catholics, by sharing our faith in Jesus with vulnerable people, we can bring hope to any situation.

Belief in Jesus is not just a pious feeling but a firm confidence in his power to set us free from all that would bind us. It could be a spirit of un-forgiveness which is souring some of our relationships or a spirit of jealousy which is taking us over and causing havoc.

These spirits need to be shown the door, but before Jesus can do it, he needs our consent. In other words we have to want it more than anything else. When we experience relief, the Lord's words will make a deep impression on us as they did for the people in today's gospel.