

You can do evil by doing good. Take your job for example, or mine. Whatever we do we do for the good of society or the family. It's good to have employment, we weep with those who have none, but it's not good if our work controls us, if we take so much time for it that we consider our other responsibilities too little. It's possible that by overdoing the good of our jobs we do the evil of neglecting other things.

There are other examples. Some people who volunteer too much time may be running away from part of their lives. Some parents overprotect their children and drive away the very ones they want to bring close. Or since food, shelter, and clothing are good for us, we rationalize that we can overeat, stuff our closets, and buy more things for our homes. Too much of a good thing is not good at all, contrary to the opinion of Mae West, who said, "Too much of a good thing is not enough."

You can do evil by doing good. That's the hard truth of the exorcism in today's Gospel. We only know a couple of things about this man possessed by a demon. One is that he hangs around the synagogue, the other is that he proclaims Jesus to be the Holy One of God. Those are not qualities we easily associate with demonic possession. If those are the criteria, Jesus could accuse any one of us of having an evil spirit.

And, in a sense, we do. If we're honest I think we can all say we find ourselves doing the evil we'd rather not do. It's as if something else has hold of us. It can be hard to see because sometimes the evil we do is disguised as good. Sometimes we please only ourselves when our actions imitate the good.

Whenever we examine our consciences we often look at the evil we do and ask why we did it. Another way is to look at the good we do and ask why we did it. Are our motives pure? Do we honestly seek the good of others, or are we looking out for ourselves alone?

When Jesus silences the demon in the Gospel today it convulses the man and rushes out of him screaming. When we recognize the intentions of our heart it can have a similar effect. We may not like what we see, it may even convulse us. But the pressure we feel in the pit of our stomachs is pressure from the hand of Christ, which drives out evil even as it blesses what is good.