

Religion

Biblical myths inescapable

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 10, 1991
Mk. 1:29-39

Question:
Are you afraid of demons?
Answer:
1. Yes, I am afraid.
2. No, I don't believe they even exist.
3. Are you kidding? We can and will ship Patriot missiles anywhere in the world to protect those threatened by the attacks of demons.

Today's Gospel reading occurs at the end of the same sabbath that we read about last week. After the synagogue service, Jesus goes with two of his disciples to the home of two other disciples, the brothers, Simon and Andrew. Jesus heals their mother-in-law, and then spends an intimate afternoon in a private home.

After sundown, however, the sabbath is over, and the people of the town of Capernaum gather outside the door. They seek the healing of their illnesses and the exorcism of their possessed friends and relatives.

This is a common occurrence in Mark's Gospel. Jesus' actions of healing and exorcism are visible signs of his teaching: the Kingdom is among you. As Jesus heals and exorcises demons, the Kingdom is both demonstrated and brought closer.

What is demonstrated in his teaching and in his actions of healing and exorcism will be finally and clearly presented in his death of resurrection.

As to the question of what to make of demons in the Gospel of Mark and in the modern world,



Religion and Reality
by
Jim Ryan

two responses...

1. Northrop Frye has this to say. If heaven is all that we desire in life, then the demonic is all that we reject in life.

"The demonic divine is all that is unmoved by our pleas, our reasoning, or our best motives. The demonic demands sacrifices, punishes presumption, and enforces obedience to laws as an end in themselves.

The demonic refers to both a world of nature untouched by human hands, the desert is an example; as well as to a world of wasted or ruined, or useless or foolish human effort, the city of Babylon is a classic example of this.

Both the desert and Babylon are the settings of our current war in the Gulf. (The ancient city of Babylon is very close to the city of Baghdad).

2. As Joseph Campbell would say, we're living out the myths of the heavenly kingdom and the demonic kingdom in our daily lives. He notes that what distinguishes the Judaeo-Christian myth of Deuteronomy and the Muslim myth from the

Greek myth is that for both, God is viewed as being on only one side, while the Greek myths show the gods on both sides of the earthly battle.

The war in the Gulf is making clear to us just how inescapable these Biblical myths are for our culture.

We may assert that we are a secular society, that we have turned away from the heat of religion and myth, and embraced the cool of the sciences, and yet how can we explain that all of our opponents are mad-men, crazed, or demonic?

A FINAL PROPHECY

If Northrop Frye's depiction of the battle between good and evil is correct, expect to see George Bush undergo an operation or develop a limp in the next few months. Mutilation or physical handicap is a sign that the good leader is suffering in order to free his people from evil.

Endnote: Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 1973, p. 147f. Campbell, "Mythologies of War and Peace," from the book, *Myths to Live By*, 1982.

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"A HEARTY WELCOME TO ALL"

Lent begins with Shrovetide

By REV. CAROL SKIDMORE
Chich of St. Alban, The Martyr,
Glen Williams

As we approach Spring we look toward Lent and Easter. Lent for many, begins with Shrovetide.

In Britain, Shrove Tuesday is "Pancake Day" and the Monday is still known in some districts as "Collup Monday". Both refer to the days when the Lenten fast was more strictly observed, and all the meat, eggs, fat and cream had to be eaten up before the solemn Lenten season began on Ash Wednesday. Although the English specialized in making Pancakes, the Germans used up the fat by making wonderful doughnuts on Shrove Tuesday.

With the thought of the forty-day fast looming before them, Shrovetide has come to be associated with the word "Carnival" or "Mardi Gras". A time of fun and feasting before the clock strikes "midnight" and the beginning of Lent arrives.

Until that moment, great merriment and thankfulness is expressed in the various forms of Carnival celebrations. For some, the traditional "Shrove Tuesday Pancake Race" is a must and is enjoyed as a family event.

Every woman taking part in the race wears a headscarf and an apron. She brings along her best frying pan for the race, and pancake batter mixture is placed in the heated fry pan just before

the race begins. They line up along the starting line, and set off when a whistle is sounded. Before reaching their destination, each participant must toss the pancake three times (in honor of the Trinity). Failure to do so means disqualification. The winner is the first home with the pancake tossed three times and still in the pan.

Some feel that if we begin our Lenten observances feeling cheerful and grateful to God for the good things in life, we get Lent started off on a better footing. But the pancakes and celebrations do not mean much, if they do not take into account the real nature of the feast and its significance and symbolism.

Some churches have recognized Shrovetide, as a time when the faithful come to seek forgiveness and the cleansing of one's sin, as they begin the Lenten season. The word "to shrive" means to pronounce "absolution". In pre-reformation England, people queued up at church to go to confession and be "shriven" as Lent began.

A bell would be rung on Shrove Tuesday to beckon them to Church. It was a sombre realization that the feast would soon end, and the forty-day fast would begin.

Some say it is cheating to try to have Carnival - or even pancakes on Pancake Day - without following it up with a meaningful Lent.

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