

## Father Christopher Roberts' July 29, 2018 Homily

Have you ever received an exorcism?

Everyone who has received the sacrament of baptism in the Catholic Church has. We know from written evidence that the rite of baptism in the Catholic Church has included a prayer of exorcism since at least the third century. It is quite possible that a prayer of exorcism in the rite of baptism dates back to the apostles themselves.

If you were baptized before 1971, the priest would have pronounced the following form of exorcism over you:

*Go forth from him, unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.*

*I exorcise thee, unclean spirit...that thou goest out and depart from this servant of God, N...  
Therefore, accursed devil, acknowledge thy sentence, and give honor to the living and true God:  
...and depart from this servant of God, N....*

*I exorcise thee, unclean spirit... that thou depart from this creature of God N, which our Lord hath deigned to call unto His holy temple....*

Since 1971, exorcism prayer has been made somewhat shorter and more sober:

*Almighty and ever-living God, you sent your only Son into the world to **cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil**, to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness, and bring him into the splendor of your kingdom of light. We pray for this child: set him (her) free from original sin, make him a temple of your glory, and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him.*

Some people say that the devil is not real but rather a personification of evil that helps us to understand the reality of sin. My own experience is that the devil is quite real. The name *devil* means one who divides or scatters. The devil tempts us to break our unity of love with God and others through sin. Baptism sets us free from the dominion that Satan holds over the world.

In the second reading, Saint Paul urges the members of the Church in Ephesus “to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received...” remembering that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” A bit of context will be helpful. In the first century, Ephesus was an extremely wealthy and populous port. It was a center of trade and a tourist destination, having the temple of Diana, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It also had one of the world’s largest libraries. All of the vices that came with being such a large city were prominent: drunken carousing, prostitution, the slave trade, crooked merchants, bribery, oppression of the poor and other things too sordid to mention.

When we contemplate these realities, we begin to understand why Paul said that the devil reigns in this world (2 Cor 4:4) and that we humans are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:16) living as we do in a world so polluted by sin. If we make an honest and searching examination of the world around us, we will recognize that first-century Ephesus is not the only place where the devil has sown the seeds of strife and division. Watching the nightly news makes this abundantly clear.

Remembering that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” involves calling to mind that we no longer have to live as the world around us does—using and being used, dominating and being dominated—constantly suffering under the sinful divisions that are the handiwork of the devil, the prince of this world. In baptism, God the Father has claimed us for his own in a permanent way, freeing us from the dominion of the devil and marking us forever as adopted children of His in Jesus Christ. Through our baptism, God the Father continues even today to speak to us and call us His beloved, echoing those words He spoke to Jesus in the Baptism in the Jordan. This is the gift of baptism. We do well to reflect frequently on the awesome and amazing nature of this grace.

Like any gift that we receive from God, responsibility comes with baptism. As Saint Paul teaches, we must live in a way that corresponds to the great gift of God’s love that we have received. If the devil divides, God’s love draws people together. God wants to employ us as His instruments to lead people toward Him. Baptism is a good infection, an infection with divine love. This infection should be contagious, spreading from us to all of those around us.

Here are some practical ways to spread the good infection. Think of these as homework.

Individually: Set aside at five to fifteen minutes every morning and every evening for some form of spiritual exercise, whether it be reading the Bible, silent meditation, the rosary or something else.

Within the home: Pray together. Read a part of the Gospel together and talk about what it means. Seek entertainment that has a Catholic or at least Christian inspiration. Put religious symbols like crucifixes in prominent places.

Outside the home: When eating in public, pray before meals just as you do in private. Put a crucifix on the dashboard of your car. Go out of your way to be kind to those who wait on you. Don’t be ashamed to admit that you are a follower of Jesus Christ who belongs to the Catholic Church.

Don’t forget to do your homework!