

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR 4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The Romans hated Judea because to them it was a religious mine-field of crackpot preachers and zealots and trouble, being poorly controlled by self-righteous High Priests, very demanding ones, who followed a code, a Law, they did not generally understand.

And Jesus was often seen as just one of these troublemakers, and he could have remained pretty much like that, except for the power he showed in the actions he took, and the way he spoke and it was received.

In the gospel today he sets out at the start of a missionary life that would carry his word to the ends of the world. The reason he succeeded is in the way how from the start people sensed that this was a message far beyond the other wandering preachers in its 'authority' and content, as the gospel says. When it is also backed up with his clear desire to heal people, to bring them back into society, to heal society, he struck a cord with a wide range of people, Jews and others, poor and rich. (And, outrageously for some, welcomed non-Jews too, a message without boundaries.) But as we know the healing and speaking was part of a greater mission.

Chaos Theory is now an accepted part of science and mathematics. At one time chaos was seen to be completely random, but now deeper laws are seen behind 'chaos'. The butterfly effect is part of this.

But in earlier days, and remember this is written in those pre-science, as we know it, days and is of its time, chaos was what we normally think to be. Out of control. And as such it was seen to be an enemy of creation. Water, wild water, was often the image people used, and right at the beginning of the Bible what has to be cleared to one side for God to be able to create is a wild and stormy void. God breathes his spirit into this to clear and create a space in which to build.

'Chaos' was seen to the enemy of creation, of the good, of God and of our world's survival. In the Old Testament the waters are often used as a threat to life. Indeed we fear it still as in the film, 'A Perfect Storm,' lost at sea. So order is the sign of the good, the presence of God at peace in his creation.

When people of Jesus' time encountered convulsions, this fell into the world of chaos. The person suffering from convulsions must have been taken over by the world of evil, they thought, the bad, for their lives were chaotic. Uncontrollable and something outside the peace of creation.

Our gospel today takes place in a synagogue, where the people of God meet to be with God. A holy place. One that fits in well with God's world of order. But we find at the heart of it something wrong, something disordered, to their minds. 'How can a person who clearly exhibits disorder and evil be in a God-space?' It is actually surprising anyone let him in.

The story-teller, Mark, lets the supposed evil within the man speak, the unclean spirit. Because it speaks for the enemy of the good, of Jesus and his mission.

Jesus is here to defeat evil in all its aspects. So, practically, he heals the man, he drives out the chaos and restores him to how he should be as God created him (remember this is set in their time). But more deeply Mark is talking to us about who Jesus is and what he is about. Yes, he comes to heal and to teach, but remember, as we said before, that what Mark is focusing on is the the crucifixion, because it is at that central moment Jesus seems to succumb the the power of evil, to chaos, and yet turns the tables on it and defeats it.