

“I know who you are...” These bone chilling words in today’s gospel were snarled from the mouth of a man possessed by an evil spirit. It is frightening to imagine how these spirits must have reacted any of the times that they were confronted by the presence of Jesus throughout His public ministry. There are numerous occasions where demons are said to have spoken to Christ through various individuals, all of whom were always able to recognize Jesus’ divinity. For a period at the beginning of His preaching, Jesus wanted that the fullness of His identity be concealed and so He would forbid them from more publicly declaring the reality that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, they did know who He was. Hence the almost creepy proclamation we just heard, “I know who you are, *the Holy One of God.*”

This title was reminiscent to the Jews of Jesus’ time as a direct reference to the type of holiness which was reserved to God alone, and in a special way, a type of holiness which God Himself bestowed upon those whom He had chosen. One example would have been King David, anointed by God to shepherd His flock, and therefore himself considered A ‘holy one of God’. Jesus, however, is not one among other “holy ones”; no, Jesus is declared, from the most surprising of sources, as THE ‘holy one of God’. It is an admission of His true nature which is divine; one in being with God the Father. What is unsettling, however, is that this admission is coming from a demon. The devil knows that Jesus is God.

This fact is something which we also believe, but we do so in faith. We profess it in the thorough formulation of the Nicene Creed: *I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son...consubstantial with the Father.* Certainly it is easy for us to recite those words, but when we do so, do we comprehend what we are saying? Do we believe in it and live by it? That is another question altogether. With each profession of faith, we are stating our belief that Jesus is God. But while the demons of Jesus' day uttered this truth in fear and trembling, overpowered by the sheer force of who Jesus is, we run the risk of it rolling off our tongues as easily as placing our order in a restaurant- or worse, we might have put even *more thought* into such as that!

The devil knows and believes that Jesus is God, but do we? Our parish has been introduced to some of the missionary work of a movement called CCO: Catholic Christian Outreach. One of their tools of evangelization on university campuses is to conduct what they call "60 second surveys" with students. Using some incentive like a bag of chips or freshly popped popcorn, they ask passersby if they would take 60 seconds to complete a survey. Among the questions, one which they ask is, "Do you believe that Jesus is God?" You might not be surprised to learn that typically, a majority of students say 'No'; however, among many of those who say no, they indicated in the previous questions that they were brought up in some denomination of Christianity.

A parish in this country which shall remain nameless once undertook to conduct these same surveys with parishioners who were leaving Sunday Mass one weekend. After tabulating the results, the pastor of the parish was shocked to discover that 60%, 6-0, of his Sunday Mass-going-parishioners had indicated that *they did not believe* that Jesus was God. This is nothing short of alarming!

Perhaps some of you are now sitting unusually uncomfortably in your uncomfortable pew, thinking to yourself, “I didn’t know Jesus was God…” Don’t worry- that is precisely the point of this homily! We must take very seriously, though, the fact that throughout the gospel, it was the spirit of evil who more consistently and frequently affirmed Christ’s divinity than anyone else. In his letter to an early Christian community, St. James says, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (2: 19). If the devil knows this truth, then we who profess to be followers of Jesus better know too!

It is a popular, modern concept to affirm that Jesus was a kind man, a generous soul, a good example, a great prophet, a strong moral leader, etc. However, if we believed that He was only any one of these, or even all of them combined but that’s all, then we would be the fools for following Him. Countless people have given up their lives for Him and it certainly was not because of His human decency. If Jesus was not God then He would not have had the capacity to perfectly reconcile all of humanity to the Father. It is because He is perfectly

God and perfectly man that He is able to represent both sides. He is the true and complete mediator which the human race longed for until His coming. This is why He is our Lord; this is why we worship Him.

St. John Chrysostom has observed that “[the devil] does recognize Christ’s holiness, but this knowledge is not accompanied by charity.” The demons *knew* Jesus was God, but they didn’t love Him for it. In fact, they despised Him for it. The opposite danger would be for us to love Him *without* believing that He’s God. There is only one option for us: either He is the Lord as He Himself eventually claimed, or He was a crook. If we love a crook, then we’re crazy. But if we love the Lord, then we can inherit what Satan and his angels rejected: eternal life.