

SUNDAY THEOSIS #4-56

Sacramental Living By Michael Haldas

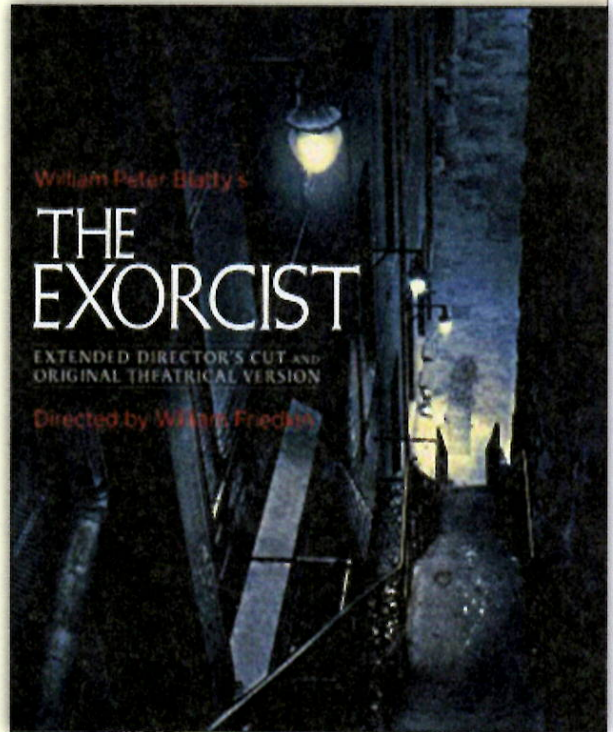
Thoughts on Godly “Possession”

Possession.

When you read this word or hear this word, ask yourself what comes to mind. Maybe the first thing you think of is something you own as in a possession. Or maybe you think of demonic possession like in the movie *The Exorcist*. In either case, whether it made you think about your things or something very spiritually dark, my guess is it is not a word that would make you think to describe your relationship with God. Yet, it is a word that really does describe the relationship God wants to have with us. He actually wants to possess us. Does that mean He wants to own us or take over our identity?

Before we explore the answers to those questions, it's useful to discuss possession as we commonly understand it in a demonic sense and also how we see it in examples in the Bible. In terms of a common understanding, the movie *The Exorcist*, though graphic and “over the top,” is actually a good illustration from a

certain point of view. The young girl, Regan MacNeil, becomes completely possessed by a demon after dabbling with a Ouija Board. Her physical appearance transforms as does her voice. When she speaks, it is the demon speaking, not her. She is utterly trapped inside herself and the demon is in complete control. Her own will is nearly completely gone and her actions and words are the demon's.



The Gospels show us a similar phenomenon through several examples. The most graphic and detailed is in Mark 5 and Luke 8. Here we read

about the Gadarene Demoniac (Matthew 8 has a similar story but with a few differences). In both these accounts, the man is seemingly possessed, and like Regan from the movie, cries out in torture and injures himself bodily. In reality, the word “possessed” is never used in the original Greek. It came from an error in the King James version because the translators didn’t know what word to use. The word in used in the original Greek by the New Testament authors was *daimonizomai* (dahee-mon-id’-zom-ahee) which means plagued and tormented. However, since the man in the Mark and Luke accounts is

utterly and completely in torment, we can use the word possess safely in the connotative sense to describe this incident.

When the possessed man addresses Christ, it is not the man who is speaking but the demon. When Christ asks him his name, the demon replies his name is Legion for he is many. It is not until Jesus sends Legion into the nearby pigs (who then drown themselves), and we see that Legion has left him, then we see the real man. Both Gospels tell the post-possession encounter with the man through the eyes of the Disciples, and both state



the man was now in “his right mind.” He was himself again.

In Luke 4 and Mark 1, Jesus encounters a demon possessed man in a synagogue. Again, when the man addresses Christ it is the demon who speaks. The man’s will is completely controlled and submerged. In Matthew 9, Jesus heals a demon possessed man who was made mute by the demon and wasn’t able to speak until Christ casts the demon out of him. There are other examples but a common denominator in each example is that the demon completely controlled the person.

C.S. Lewis wrote a famous book called *The Screwtape Letters* and likely many of you reading this essay have read it. If you haven’t, the book is a fictional account of a senior demon named Screwtape, who writes a series of letters to a junior demon, his nephew and protégé named Wormwood. In these letters, Screwtape instructs Wormwood on the art of temptation. The premise of the book is that the devil assigns a demon to each human being with the intent of destroying that person and keeping him or her from uniting with the Enemy, God. Ultimately Wormwood fails as the man he tries to tempt aligns with God and dies and goes to Heaven. Screwtape’s last letter to Wormwood tells the junior demon that because of his failure, Screwtape and other senior demons

are going to consume him and his spiritual essence. This theme of consumption runs throughout the book as Screwtape makes it clear that the devil and all of his demons want human souls solely for food. They want to utterly consume the essence, or the being, of every person.

Contrast this with God who wants to possess us too. This may sound shocking or off base but it’s true. However, God wants to possess us very differently. In the Gospel of John, Christ states He and the Father are one. In particular, in John 17:21, He prays, “that they all may be as one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also be one in Us.” St. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

These Scriptures (and others) reveal the truth that Christ wants to be one with us. This oneness with Him is our goal. It is to draw so close to Christ and have such an intimate union with Him so that He does live in us and that our will and His will become one. Think about it like this. When we desire to come to church and worship, pray, or fast, or read the Bible, or be loving and selfless - these desires are all Christ living in us and guiding us in the deepest place of our being - our hearts. But He never controls us or tries to rob us of our identity as persons. Our identity, who we are, is His gift to us in the first



place. When we have wrong thoughts or do wrong things, Christ doesn't forcibly stop us because of His gift to us of free will. But He longs for us to choose Him and His will and ways and that is the beauty of our faith. We never lose who we are as persons in this growth and union with Christ - just the opposite. We realize more and more of our true selves. It's the complete reverse of what we see in Scriptures when someone is possessed by a demon and has lost their identity. Union with God, or allowing ourselves to be possessed by Him

so to speak, brings nothing but joy, peace, and full realization of who we are and are meant to be in this life. Though we will never achieve this union in full in this lifetime, we can continue to grow and transform and express more and more of Christ's likeness each day.

To help us in this journey, unlike the demons who are takers and want us for their food, Christ, who is the ultimate giver, offers Himself as food for us through His body and blood. He offers Himself to us so we can consume Him and in doing so become one with Him. This oneness is a process and that is why we do all the things we do sacramentally, day after day, week after week, and year after year so we can continue to grow by the grace of the Holy Spirit into Christ-likeness.

The principle to be learned here is simple: that which is evil wants to consume us while that which is good, God, lovingly wants us to be fully and freely realized as the persons He created us to be.

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