

The Catholic Ministry of Deliverance Fr Rufus Pereira

Influenced by their secular education many in the Church don't believe in the existence of the devil or the reality of evil spirits. Yet with the growth in interest in the occult in society at large many people, often innocently, are beginning to become affected by evil spirits and need the Church's help to deliver them. FR RUFUS PEREIRA from India, is an acknowledged expert in the field of healing and deliverance and is the President of the International Association of Exorcists, a Vatican approved body. Below he explains the Catholic understanding of deliverance and its place in the Church's ministry.

INTRODUCTION

It is very clear from the Bible that Satan or the Devil, (the Hebrew and Greek words for the enemy) does exist and afflicts man. This is also the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church reflected in its theology and in its official pronouncements. But above all it is a rediscovery of our present day pastoral ministry that has shown us that there are many problems and evils today which are the result not only of one's own sinfulness (the flesh), or of the pressures and hurts caused by sinful man (the world), but of some oppressive preternatural personified evil (the devil), and that such problems and evils cannot be dealt with adequately simply by personal repentance and interpersonal reconciliation but need what is called the act of deliverance or liberation from this spiritual evil power or force (1 Pet 5.8,9: Eph 6.10-13).

JESUS OUR MIGHTY DELIVERER

As a result of succumbing to the wiles of the enemy, man brought disaster upon the whole human race. God so loved the human race, however, that he did not abandon them, but gave through the incarnation, his only Son, Jesus, the Saviour, who would crush the hold of Satan on man's life, redeem him from his power and restore him back to his Father God.

When Jesus was 30 years old he would receive the authority of the Father to proclaim the good news to the captives and the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and deliver the oppressed. Peter would later say how God anointed Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit, and that is why he went around doing good, healing all those who were under Satan's power because God was with him. (Acts 10.38).

And so Jesus went to every town and village of Galilee, preaching and teaching, healing and casting out demons, for he had come to establish the kingdom of God by destroying the works of Satan (1 Jn 3.6). He further sent his apostles with the mandate to go out to the whole world and to proclaim the Gospel to all creation; to cast out devils in his name and to lay their hands on the sick and heal them (Mk 16:15-18).

DELIVERANCE IN THE CHURCH

Throughout its history the Church has carried out the mandate Christ has entrusted to her, through the specific ministry of exorcism and the general ministry of deliverance. But it is especially today that through the Catholic Charismatic Renewal people are becoming more aware of the existence and the influence of Satan, of the dangerous folly of seeking help from "wrong" sources and the availability of the resources of the Church to not only heal them from sickness but to set them free from such demonic influence and attacks.

But for us in our Catholic tradition, deliverance is a manifestation of compassion for the oppressed rather than an exercise of power against the oppressor. It is also a process of liberation consisting of what should happen before, during and after the prayer of deliverance rather than a once and for all act of zeal and “holy violence”.

BEFORE THE PRAYER OF DELIVERANCE

One cannot sufficiently emphasise the need for a minimum of discernment and of preparation before, if possible, the actual prayer for deliverance. Discernment is exercised both through a careful observation of signs or symptoms and especially through the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit (since we are dealing with spiritual matters) and is confirmed both by one’s own previous experience and, if there is need, through consultation with those more experienced in this ministry. The process of deliverance becomes even quicker and more certain if there is a possibility of what is called “inner healing”

Discernment is needed to know accurately which areas of a person’s life are being targeted, the sources or root causes and the entry points of a particular demonic influence or attack as well as the channels of such affliction. Discernment is especially needed to know whether a person needs medical or psychiatric care rather than deliverance, or whether we are dealing with some sort of occult control or ancestral influence, or if there is some connection with a new religious movement, or a link to a questionable alternative medicine, or even if there may be some infestation of a building or place etc.

The process of deliverance becomes even quicker and more certain if there is a possibility of what is called “inner healing”. This involves finding out the root cause of emotional disturbances which often open a person to demonic disturbances. Inner healing also removes the blocks of a lack of repentance, a lack of forgiveness and a lack of renunciation.

DURING THE PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

It is obvious that especially in this ministry there must be both spiritual and practical preparation for deliverance, which in most cases needs to be done privately and discreetly in a suitable and proper environment. The actual prayer of deliverance may be both imprecatory (binding and casting out) and intercessory. It may also consist of both formal or official and spontaneous, and even silent parts. Those in the charismatic renewal have testified to the great power of the prayer of praise and of praying in tongues in this ministry. Many have also testified to the role of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation in deliverance and the added help of the Sacramentals, especially blessed water, and the intercession of Mary, the angels and saints.

The need for ongoing discernment as to whether the person does need deliverance continues during the prayer. This is mainly verified and confirmed through the person’s reactions to holy objects and to those in spiritual authority. There is also need here for discerning the “names of evil spirits”, “familiar spirits”, “animal spirits”, “words of knowledge”, “resting in the spirit” etc. Finally one needs to discern whether the person has been successfully delivered and to evaluate the reasons for any failure, in order to know how to proceed later on.

AFTER THE PRAYER OF DELIVERANCE

The process of deliverance continues even after a successful deliverance, in helping the one delivered to close the door of his soul to the enemy, and to open them to the Paraclete. Jesus himself warned us that when an evil spirit leaves a man, he will go in search of another place but if he does not find a suitable one, he will want to go back "home". Finding it swept and clean but empty he will reenter the man with seven other evil spirits and the condition of this man will be much worse than before (Lk 11.23-26). Jesus too went in search of the paralysed man a second time to caution him not to sin any more lest something worse would happen to him (Jn 5.14). It is essential therefore that there is provision in this ministry for personal and communal aftercare, that will ensure that a person's deliverance is maintained, bringing him into the fellowship of the Church and even motivating him to witness to the Lord (Mk5.20).

CONCLUSION

Although only priests officially designated as "exorcists" may deal with cases of "possession", **we can all by virtue of our baptism pray for deliverance for ourselves and in simple cases for our family members or friends.** But there are those, both priests and lay people, who seem to have a special charism of praying for deliverance, which can be discerned by the fruits of their success and by their sober and well-balanced approach, which needs to be confirmed by the community and the Church. Because of the nature of this demanding but necessary ministry those involved need to pray for protection for themselves and their families. They need to be humble, compassionate, fearless, prayerful, knowledgeable, prudent and wise, working in teams, even including psychiatrists and be under the authority of the Church. The promotion of such an ongoing and systematic ministry of deliverance within the local church is and should be an integral part of the New Evangelisation in the New Millennium, especially today when, as the Vatican's Osservatore Romano warns us, Satanism in all its forms and through all the modern means of communication, is rearing its ugly head.

Reprinted with permission from ICCRS July/August newsletter 2001