



“... as Jesus arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, there met him a man from the city who had demons...”

There are people who come during the week, especially in the mornings, who resemble the young man possessed by demons: half or fully naked, seemingly controlled by something beyond our understanding. It happened last week; it happened again this week. When they are fed and clothed, offered a cup of coffee, a warm meal, and the presence of a heart learning to listen, they might sometimes reveal their names, their life stories, their distress, and what they are running from.

Unlike the gospel today, not everyone who comes through the doors is a success story. Many find themselves sinking into the abyss of the modern heart, where no bottom can be reached. In these cases, the evil spirits need no pigs, they take hold of the

young men themselves. They take their lives. What remains, however, is the story, the name, the truth that was heard, and the prayer for forgiveness. For them and for us. And for God, that He may intervene in the hell we are living in, the one from which we drive Him away because we cannot bear to stay too close to Him. Because we are afraid, not of the demons, but of the risen Christ. We are afraid, and we want to stop the new joy.

The gospel today seems to resemble a train station or an airport, because it is filled with movement. Movement in many directions, some of them quite unexpected.

It is Christ who initiates everything. Jesus comes and encounters the young man, whose own movement is self-destructive and unceasing. He is stopped and healed. The demons leave the man's body and enter the pigs, which then rush into the abyss. People come from the city and ask Jesus to leave, and so He does, returning to the other side of the Gennesaret lake. But before departing, He tells the young man to go into the city and bear witness to the goodness of God. And he does, he goes and tells everyone.

The witness of the healed man reminds us of something said this week by a man to someone sitting at his table: that God is at work in his life. He has experienced it and he shared his story. He spoke of how he wanted to give up on life because his girlfriend did not want to keep their baby. He struggled with addiction and deep, violent distress. We remembered his story well, because at that time he had come to the church desperately searching for something: to confess his distress and the hell he was living in. Eventually, he ended up spending some time in prison, and that helped him to stay clean.

The girlfriend kept the baby, but because she was unable to care for him, she gave him up for adoption. The man is now somewhat at peace with what happened. He still struggles to stay clean, but the child is being taken care of by good people. He is allowed to visit him. They even brought the child to see him while he was in prison. He remembers how the child was upset because he was unable to embrace his father because of the glass between them. He remains on good terms with the mother, though their relationship has changed. They are friends now and still talk. He believes it is better this way. When they were together, their lives were filled with distress, and too much violence emerged from that pain for both of them.

The young man said with conviction that God had intervened in his life and changed its course, just when he was ready to give up. Today, he is not fully healed, but others are safe, and above all, he has hope. And faith that God loves him. When he realizes this, he cannot hold back his tears.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (today orthros gospel)

It was a strange moment, to say the least, a brief conversation with a polite and well-mannered person who comes regularly in the mornings. He seems educated, though he does not know much about the gospel. His question, which did not seek an answer but seemed spoken only to hear itself, was this: “Don’t we think that Jesus, being from Israel, should have stayed there and not come to North America? I understand that His message is universal, but when it comes to the practicalities of life, He doesn’t belong to these lands. There are other customs here, different spirits, a different culture. Don’t we think it’s not His place to come here, to impose Himself on a people of another culture and spirituality?” The question sounded even stranger because it came from a man with a strong accent, who himself was from South Asia.

It is not for the spirits to decide whether Christ comes or not, but for people to choose whether to welcome Him. The question of hospitality has been present throughout the week in the Gospels, the hospitality of man toward God.

On Thursday we heard about Jesus being rejected by his own people (Matthew 13:54-58). Then He sent His apostles out two by two, warning them of the lack of hospitality they might face (Luke 10:1-15). On Friday, He was rejected by the cities where He had performed the greatest signs (Capernaum and Bethsaida). And in today’s gospel, He is rejected once again, by the people of the region of the Gadarenes, and even by the person who comes to eat breakfast. He is rejected even as He feeds him and us all.

The lack of hospitality creates the abyss that gathers the evil spirits: the absence of welcome for Christ. In Friday’s reflection, the abyss was described as the distress of a person who departs from the presence of God (Elisha). How can Christ enter the heart of a person who, in distress, turns away from him? How can He enter a land that claims a different spirituality, one

that keeps people captive to ideologies and practices that numb the spirit and wound those in need of care and communion? We see today that Jesus does not impose himself, he leaves the land where He is not welcomed, but not before healing the one who had no freedom. That's how he enters, in freedom.

Care makes the one who is in bondage free, because he can act on it. It is the way in which Christ heals us, through freedom. Compassion sets us free, because within the abyss the heart is touched and an invitation is made. And as Luis was saying on Friday, it does not matter how deep is the abys we are coming from, God touches us with freedom and makes us anew. It is true that, withing the community, we often feel hopeless because the abyss of the other mirrors the coldness of our own hearts. And we lose faith that we can still learn to care and that a presence can still be encountered within the communal abyss. We cannot see freedom even when we stumble upon it. But this is precisely the place where the light shines in the darkness: from the one who acts without seeing, but believing. And the nurturing of life spreads within the hearts of many, because freedom reveals the love of God in our lives. And through that, the love of our brothers and sisters. And thus, we feel free again.



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