



Lent reflection for March 2, 2024

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Mark 5:1-20

They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding, and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the man possessed by demons sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion, and they became frightened. Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused and said to him, "Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Today's Reflection is by Matt Garklavs

This passage is full of so much intense imagery. A man in chains beating himself with stones, the cemetery, a herd of swine charging off a cliff and drowning in the sea. What a hellscape of horrors! It's hard to find hope in this story because it involves so much suffering. Unlike other miracles Jesus performs like healing the blind or raising the dead, this exorcism provokes fear and confusion among those who witnessed it. In some respects, it provides a classic portrayal of good vs evil, but it's hard to see the conclusion as a triumph. Sure, a demon is cast out of a possessed man, but that comes at the expense of two thousand living beings enduring a violent death.

Another part of this passage that stood out to me is the emphasis on "God's mercy". Jesus instructs the man to tell his people "what mercy he has shown you", but it's not clear if that's what he did. The last sentence states that the man proclaimed "how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed", but what exactly were they amazed by? Was it the abstract notion of "God's mercy" or the story itself? Given the dramatic circumstances surrounding the exorcism I imagine people were probably more interested in the latter.

At the beginning of this passage the possessed man was enduring so much pain that he was beating himself with stones, but he eventually gave himself up to God and was healed. I imagine he still suffered from the afflictions of whatever physical or mental illness he endured prior to confronting Christ, but at least he wasn't inflicting more pain upon himself. It's also noteworthy that Jesus wanted the man to act as a messenger to his people. When we overcome difficult situations in life, it's important to share that wisdom and grace with those around us. This proliferation of healing and achieving grace truly is the miracle of Christ and a heavy counterpoint to the "Legion" we all encounter in life.



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