

To our ears, the story in today's gospel reading is strange. It dates to the earliest of the Christian oral tradition and is found in all three of the synoptic gospels. It is the story of a man possessed by so many demons that the suffering man called himself "Legion," for so many demons had entered him. We do not have to believe in demonic possession for this story to teach us much, although it is perfectly alright if you want to believe in demonic possession; certainly you would be in good Christian company.

It is also interesting that in Matthew and Mark, as well as Luke, this story of the demonic exorcism is immediately preceded by another story of miraculous deliverance, this one a nature miracle. The oral tradition tells us that one day Jesus and some of his disciples, fishermen, decided to cross the Lake of Gennesaret, also called the Sea of Galilee, in a small fishing boat. During the crossing, a sudden storm arose, nearly swamping the boat. Interestingly, Jesus was taking what was no doubt a well-deserved nap, as the boat was tossed by the waves. Our Lord's friends were terrorized. They awakened him, pleading that he do something to rescue them, and he did. He told the wind to die down, and the wind did as told. The lake waters became calm. The disciples marveled that even the winds and the sea obeyed Jesus.

In both of these stories, those who experienced the miraculous actions of Jesus were amazed, and in the story of the exorcism, the local people were terrified – Jesus possessed strange power. But however we as modern, enlightened and educated people respond to these accounts, we need to examine, within ourselves, the fundamental question that they raise. The question is, "Who *is* Jesus?" Who is this man that we are asked to accept in faith? Who is this person that expects our trust as well as our love? The Church gives us an answer. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But, reciting the answer and expressing faith by the answer are different things. You can learn stock answers from books and teachers and plain old indoctrination. Faith is never built on stock answers. Faith comes from experience. Faith comes from living and walking with God day in and day out, and trusting God with the problems of life. Faith is a living thing and faith accumulates and strengthens with experience.

As we experience Jesus, we come to know him. Openness to the experience of the Savior enables us to encounter him in ways that lead to trust, that lead to confidence and certainty. We discover him as God's perfect love, love so deep, so strong and so perfect that nothing can separate us from that love. In fear and despair, we can reject Jesus, but he never rejects us. We may not be steadfast, but the Lord is always steadfast. In the most severe of life's storms, Jesus is with us. Time spent living with the Lord brings us to deeper and deeper faith in the Lord. We reach that point in which the rote answer and the faith answer are the same. Who is this that

even the winds and the seas of troubled life obey him? Who is this that drives the demons of life away, be they psychological or demonic? He is Jesus, the Son of God. He is the Christ, the Messiah.

When we ask Jesus the Lord for something, to drive away our personal demons or to rescue us from things beyond our control, that threaten to destroy us, we are praying. Crying “Help!” to God is one aspect of prayer. We should expect prayer to be answered. It is our Christian right to expect prayer to be answered. Our Lord promised that whatever we asked in his name our heavenly Father would hear and answer. In Christian theology, an answered prayer has a name. The name is “miracle.” Miracles do not have to be showstoppers. In fact, my experience is that when we experience the hand of God in the small things of life, we are far better equipped to acknowledge God in the big events of life. The disciples asked, “Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?” Hopefully, we will come to the point that we know the answer with all the certainty that our souls can muster, but we will get there only by taking one step in faith at a time. *Amen.*