

Meditations: Monday of the Fourth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time.

- God became Man for everyone
- Jesus frees us from sin
- Finding strength in Confession

JESUS IS moved by the pain of the sick and the anguish of the possessed. He offers his mercy

without hesitation. In today's Gospel, Our Lord cures a suffering man who lives among the tombstones, possessed by a multitude of demons, in the region of Gerasa. It is pagan territory. Its people were originally from Greece and Syria, and it is therefore not surprising that there is a herd of pigs in the vicinity, in contrast to Jewish territory where breeding and eating pigs is forbidden. Jesus expelled the demons which were tormenting this man and allowed them to enter the pigs which numbered around two thousand and which then *rushed down the steep bank into the sea* (*Mk 5:13*).

This remarkable episode, in addition to demonstrating Jesus' power, clearly reveals that his mission is universal and extends to all peoples. No one is a stranger to God. At the close of the scene, the man tries to board Our Lord's boat to stay with him forever, but Jesus tells him: *Go*

home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you (Mk 5:19). He would have the task of proclaiming that the mercy of God is also available to the pagans who live there. And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled (Mk 5:20).

God has become incarnate for all men and women. This is what moved St Josemaría to say, "Those who have met Christ cannot shut themselves in their own little world: how sad such a limitation would be! They must open out like a fan in order to reach all souls."^[1] The man in this Gospel passage who was cured by Jesus was a source of wonder among those who heard his message of mercy. This is a good way of summarizing the mission of all Christians.

THE EVANGELISTS highlight Jesus' power over demons which he expels *by the finger of God* (*Lk 11:20*). On this occasion, we see how evil has destroyed this man's life. The details given by St Mark enliven our understanding of the man's condition and his disgrace: *and no one could bind him anymore, even with a chain; for he had often been bound by fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart and the fetters he broke in pieces; ...Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones* (*Mk 5:3-5*). His misfortune is a graphic representation of the loss of dignity suffered by those who fall into sin: solitude, enslavement and ultimately anger with oneself.

From far away, he recognizes Jesus and comes to meet him: *he ran and worshipped him* (*Mk 5:6*). We are then witnesses to an unusual

dialogue between Jesus and the demon which ends with these liberating words: *Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!* (Mk 5:8). The possessed man lived enchainied by his own despair and apart from the community. Our Lord's words free him from the most profound evil, from everything that could separate him from God and mar his happiness. In the Gospel perspective, the deliverance of those possessed by demons (cf. Mk 5: 1-20) acquires a broader meaning than mere physical healing: the physical ailment is seen in relation to an interior one. The disease from which Jesus sets people free is primarily that of sin.^[2]

This is what Our Lord does with each of us when we go to him. "Lord say it with a contrite heart may I never offend you again! But don't be frightened when you become aware of the burden of your poor body and of human passions: it would be silly

and childishly naïve to find out now that 'this' exists. Your wretchedness is not an obstacle but a spur for you to become more united to God and seek him constantly because he purifies us.”^[3] —

PEOPLE REACT to miracles in different ways. Some are fortified in their faith, but we also come across those who refuse to believe. Some of the Gerasenes saw the possessed man *sitting there, clothed and in his right mind...and they were afraid...* *And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighbourhood (Mk 5: 15-17).* Instead of sharing the joy of the man who had been living among the graves, they were calculating the economic impact of the drowned herd. They saw only their own interests. Jesus had become incomprehensible to them and they

asked him to leave, thus rejecting his mercy.

The essence of every sin, whether great or small, is a certain rejection of God. When we pray the “Our Father,” as Jesus advises us, we ask God not to allow us to fall into temptation and to free us from harm, because we are all exposed to the suggestions of evil. No one can think that this struggle does not affect them. In order to avoid being caught up in evil, the first thing we must do is face it without fear. When we acknowledge our interior fragility, we will humbly ask God for the strength we need.

“We all have easy access to the best means of overcoming sin and growing in love of God—the Sacraments,” said Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. Referring to the Sacrament of Penance, he asked himself: “Do I acknowledge my sins, without hiding

or masking them, and do I confess them to the priest who listens to me in the name of the Lord? Am I ready to struggle so that God, Our Lord, reigns in my soul? Do I steer clear of proximate occasions of sin?”^[4]

To avoid shutting ourselves off from the mercy of God even in small, everyday details, we can go to Mary. As we contemplate her, we share the joy of the “yes” which she always gave to the plans of God.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 193.

^[2] St. John Paul II, Catechesis, August 25, 1999.

^[3] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 134

^[4] Bl. Alvaro del Portillo, Homily, December 8, 1979.

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