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Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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ANNOUNCE TO THEM ALL THAT THE LORD HAS DONE FOR YOU

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

Today's Gospel

Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!" (He had been saying to him, Unclean spirit, come out of the man!)"

He asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "Legion is my name. There

are many of us.” And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, “Send us into the swine. Let us enter them.” And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what had happened to the possessed man and to the swine. Then they began to beg him to leave their district. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him. But Jesus would not permit him, but told him instead, “Go home to your family; announce to them all the Lord in his pity has done for you.”

MARK 5:1-20

Reflection

As members of the early Christian communities strove to assimilate and understand the mysterious events and experiences they were sharing as followers of Jesus, they encountered the invigorating and confusing reality of what were later claimed as “miracles of faith.” The origin of the modern English word is the Latin term *miraculum*, meaning an ‘object of wonder.’ The ‘miraculous’ was that which turned one’s heart and mind to the presence of God. In Greek, various words were employed to designate a ‘miracle’—wonder (*teras*), work (*ergon*), and sign (*semeion*). All of these terms are important to clarify what scripture might signify in naming numerous events and moments in life as what we term ‘miracles.’

With the passage of generations, and a turn to the metaphysical and supernatural notions that became merged with the historical identity of God among the faithful, the day-to-day ‘wonder’ that infused Christian life in all manner of things, became a more abstract reality. This reality required that the miraculous be the result of direct divine intervention, a supernatural event, or that which could not be explained or duplicated by any human knowledge or skill. Suddenly, the simplicity of innocent surprise and wonder was supplanted by a checklist of extra-normal phenomena which endowed life with the ‘miraculous.’ Clearly, the divine was no longer an intrinsic element of human reality, but rather a mysterious and inexplicable lamination from ‘outside.’

Why is this important for our comprehension of biblical stories? A great number of the narratives in the Old and New Testaments were not concerned with the absolute uniqueness of God’s being in the world. To quote Gerard Manley Hopkins in *God’s Grandeur*: “**The world is charged with the**

grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.” The ‘grandeur’ (read: ‘miraculous presence’) of God in the world is indeed ‘supernatural’ in the sense of abiding ‘above’ the mundane, but that does not mean that only the SUPERNATURAL (that which is beyond our comprehension or access) is the core of every miracle of God within the grasp of our senses and our thought. To redirect Jesus’ words from Matthew’s gospel: “To those who have eyes to see, let them see.” The ‘reality’ of the miraculous in our experience is a matter of *perception*, not a matter of *information*. Jesus and his actions invite us to ‘see’ the entirety of God’s miraculous way rather than to analyze certain elements that constitute a ‘real’ miracle.

This is the situation with the story of the Gerasene demoniac. If our focus resides in a world of demons and divine exorcism, we lose sight of the invitation within the ‘healing.’ The true core of the narrative is the love and compassion of Jesus, which bring the miracle of healing to a man whose life was shattered by madness. Whether or not this is an ‘historical’ narrative, its import is the invitation of God to bring healing love to the broken-hearted. At the conclusion of the story, Jesus tells him: **“Go home to your family; announce to them *all* the Lord in his pity has done for you.”** At the end, this is not simply an account of a possessed Gerasene and a herd of suicidal swine. It is the miraculous invitation of a compassionate God, drawing a lost soul home in peace.

In our own acknowledgment of the miracles of God in our lives, we are asked to seek for more than simply the extra-ordinary beyond our understanding. Instead, we are called to ‘see’ the innumerable “objects of wonder” that have been woven into every aspect of our own lived ‘miracles’ of mind and heart. God is the ultimate miracle of all we are, making the wonder of reality **“flame out, like shining from shook foil.”**



Miracle of Creation - Los Altos Retreat Center
Photo by Fr. David Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- How would you explain the nature of miracles in the world to someone who finds the notion confusing?
 - Can you name moments in your life that you experienced as miraculous?
 - Do you anticipate these ‘objects of wonder’ as a natural part of your path in a world of God’s ‘miracles?’
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