

## MEDITATION ON MARK 5

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No sooner that Jesus left the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came out from the tombs towards him. "The unclean spirit is the mystery of evil which surrounds us and infiltrates us. Evil is impersonal. It has no face; it has no soul; it has no heart. Even less does it have horns and a tail. The mystery of evil leads us to live in the tomb of our selves, where there are no windows opening up on the outside, no doors leading to the streets. There, the heart cannot be open to love, the hands cannot caringly touch, the eyes can see neither pain or beauty, and the ears can hear neither the cry of the oppressed or the sound of any music. There, we are chained, as we attempt to break the fetters of enslavement. There, we hurt ourselves and we hurt others.

Until the moment when "a significant other", a "meaningful speaking face" reaches out toward us. This is the moment of encounter, the moment of revelation. "Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, the man ran up and fell at his feet, and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God ?" Then Mark adds: "For Jesus had been saying to him" 'Come out of the man, unclean spirit.'"

Jesus is the significant person in this man's live, the one who invites this man to come to him. But how did the man know Jesus' name? Well, maybe someone told him that this person coming toward him was Jesus. But even more problematic, how could the man have known that Jesus was the son of the Most High God? I think that Mark is telling us something important about God's revelation, here. I believe that he is saying that Jesus' life, his eyes, his tone of voice, his whole being embodied, enfleshed, sacramentalized such a caring and healing humanity, that the man immediately felt that Jesus and he were enveloped in the same mystery: they both shared in a common humanity that is already filled with the mystery of grace.

This mystery of grace is none other than God's own infinite and indescribable capacity to love, to heal, to liberate and humanize. In this moment of encounter with Jesus, because of Jesus' deep humanity, the man recognized in Jesus what was already alive within himself: the infinite capacity of grace: the capacity to be free, the capacity to be truly human, and consequently, to be healed and to heal, to be cared for and to care, to be loved and to love, the

capacity to welcome life and to share it.

The moment of such a revelation is indeed at the same time the moment of grace: the moment when one recognizes that life remains life only as it is welcomed and shared. This moment of deep realization is not parallel to the rest of our human life. Karl Rahner explains that this moment of revelation, the moment of grace "is the ultimate depth of everything we do, when we realize ourselves -- when we laugh and cry, when we accept responsibilities, when we love, live and die; when we stand up for what we experience as true; when we break out of our preoccupation with self to reach out to others; when we hope against hope; when we refuse to be embittered by the stupidity of daily life; when in a word, we experience ourselves as living as we always wanted to live, in opposition to our selfishness and to the despair that assails us." Rahner adds: "This is where grace occurs, because all this leads us into the infinity and victory that is God." ("How to receive a sacrament and mean it," *Theology Digest*, Autumn, '71, p. 229)

Coming back to the Gospel of Mark, we read that the moment of revelation, the moment of grace is all part of a struggle which consists in refusing to let go of the tomb of self. Seeing Jesus, the man shouted at the top of his voice: "What do you want of me, Jesus?" You remember that Jesus had already commanded the evil spirit to leave. Yet, the spirit was still there.

It is at this moment that Jesus gives a face to the mystery of evil by asking it to name itself. "What is your name," Jesus asked? "My name is legion, for there are many of us," it responded. Through the naming of the mystery of evil, we can now see its face, and it is terribly forceful and ugly. Mark pushes the boundaries of his imagination to let us see the mystery of evil. "And he (the evil spirit) begged Jesus not to send them out of the district." Apparently, evil likes to stick around! "Now," Mark continues, "there was on the mountainside a great herd of pigs feeding, and the unclean spirits begged Jesus: 'Send us to the pigs, let us go into them.' So Jesus gave them leave. With that, the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd of about two thousand pigs charged down the cliff into the lake, and they were drowned." So much for the pigs! What about the evil spirits. Well Mark doesn't say.

Perhaps Mark assumes that we know very well that the mystery of evil is always in our midst, within us. It is not a "we" and "they" situation. Over here is America wrapped in the

patriotism of the flag which is perceived as the sacrament of the mystery of grace, and over there is Russia, the source of the mystery of evil. (The White House joke-person sees the world that way. "I have just outlawed Russia" (already proclaimed as the source of evil), says the funny man. "Bombing will begin in five minutes." In passing, sometimes I wonder how funny Churchpeople would have found our microphone-testing joker, had he altered his "joke" slightly, and said: "I have just outlawed all pro-life persons in the United-States. The killing of unwanted fetuses will begin in five minutes.")

For those, however, who have experienced the mystery of grace as the gift of life, that mystery can only be felt as the power of life in the midst of the powers of death. As such, the mystery of grace touches us, it is disclosed to us, it is revealed in the moment of encounter. And so, revelation takes place, not the revelation of something that was not previously there. On the contrary, revelation consists precisely in the disclosure of who we truly are and are capable of becoming. It is the momentous realization, on our part, of God's humanizing and liberating presence in our life, or as the Scriptures put it: that indeed, we are at the image of God, capable of being related to and of relating in the midst of our unrelatedness, capable of welcoming life and of sharing life in the midst of our selfishness, capable of being graced and of gracing others in the midst of our instinct of possessiveness, capable of being forgiven and healed, and of forgiving and healing in the midst of our "garbage dumping" self-destructing attitude.

Mark, however, has more to say in his story. He tells us that at the hearing of what had happened, the whole town was in an uproar. He tells us that "the swineherds ran off and told their story in the town and in the country round about; and the people came to see what had really happened." What did they really see? "As they came to Jesus, they saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his full senses -- the very man who had legion in him before -- and they were afraid." (Notice that what has happened consisted merely in the fact that someone who couldn't care and love had met someone who could care and love, and in that encounter, that person realized that he too was capable of the same. The only thing that happened, in fact, was that someone who could only live in a sub-human, de-humanized and de-humanizing condition realized that he too was worthy of truly living humanly. Today, we would say, that this person realized that he had personal, cultural, economic and political rights, all because of his grace experience. For, to welcome life, and to be capable of sharing life is at the same time to be

grounded in the right to life in all of its dimensions.)

Why is that so scary? In fact, the town people are so scarred that they implore Jesus to leave the neighborhood. Is it possible that those who have experienced the revelation of life as gift are seen as disturbing people as they thirst and struggle for justice, and work toward changing social oppressive structures, whether civil or religious? Are the people who experience life as a gift, and who want to express that gift in the sharing of life through personal, cultural, economic, political and religious human rights, are such people facing the opposition of those who hold on to life as a possession, as though life was their own little reward for being good?

But Mark has more to say. He writes: "As Jesus was sitting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to be allowed to stay with him, with Jesus. However, Jesus would not let him but said to him: 'Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you.' So the man went off and proceeded to spread throughout the region all that Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed." Mark here assumes that we know what it means "to spread all that Jesus had done for him." It is of course to do unto others what Jesus had done unto him, where one's life welcomed in gratitude becomes gift to others, especially to those who are rejected by the social structures of the state and of religion.

And so, when revelation takes place, worship as gratitude for life, and as a life for others, can truly become celebration. This is where sacramental life comes in. Baptism and Confirmation can only "cause" the mystery of grace which is alive in a person to be revealed to and celebrated by the ecclesial community. In the same way, as Rahner so well explains, the Eucharist "does not add anything to the world but celebrates what is really happening in the world. Jesus' cross is not raised again, but its mysterious presence in the world is put into words. At Mass, the Christian offers the world in bread and wine, knowing that the world is already offering itself in triumph and tears and blood to the incomprehensible, which is God. The Christian gazes into ineffable light, knowing that the real vision is given to eyes blinded with tears or glassy with approaching death. The Christian knows (that at Mass) we proclaim the death of the Lord because this death is ever present in the heart of the world and in everyone who 'dies in the Lord'. The Christian knows (that at Mass) we proclaim the Lord's coming, because He is coming in whatever brings the world closer to its goal. The Christian knows that at Mass,

we receive the true body of the Lord, knowing that it would profit us nothing, were we not in communion with the body of God which is the world itself with its destiny. There, at Mass, we hear and speak the word of God, aware that it is the verbal expression of the divine word which is the world and of the Word in which God eternally says "yes" to this world." (*Rahner*, p. 230)

Christian Worship is the response, through our life of service and celebration, to God's gracious revelation. It does not consist in anything we do for God. It merely expresses God's healing presence in our life.

The fundamental Christian experience is one of liberation and freedom. It consists in an awareness that there is only one mediator between God and his people; namely, Jesus Christ. Consequently, all other mediations are needless. In Christ, God has already accepted the dailiness of our lives in selfgiving relationships, as the sacrifice which is holy before and pleasing to Him/Her. The exclusive offerer of this sacrifice are the Christians themselves through their acts of gratitude toward God, their openness toward the neighbor, and diakonia toward the oppressed. Thus, each Christian is priest. All Christians, in Christ, the unique mediator, have direct access to God. There is no need to find someone or something holy to sanctify the Christians themselves or their gift in order that they or their gift be received by God. And no one else, but the Christian him/herself, can offer the gift.

To clarify this point, Yves Congar, the eminent French theologian, opposes the world of faith to the world of religion. Within the world of faith, there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular. In fact, here, the secular cannot be rendered sacred, nor the sacred be contaminated by the secular, for in the world of faith, all is already forever sacred, that is, holy before and pleasing to God. On the contrary, in the world of religion, the sacred must be superimposed on the secular in order that the secular be rendered acceptable to God. This is done through cultic rituals of sacralization through the world of magic.

The world of magic is one filled with multiplied mediations as means of reaching God, including special priests. On the contrary, the world of faith is one filled with symbols which reveal God's gracious presence. Within the world of faith, one experiences God not in paternalistic or maternalistic ways, but in fatherly or motherly ways; not as a child who feels the need to please a demanding father or mother through purposeless behaviors but as a child who is

filled with his father or mother's love and whose behavior radiates that love.

God is Father, but he is not paternalistic. Our freedom therefore has immense possibilities. If our actions flow from true love and from true faith-insights, they will not consist in some sort of short-termed apologetics, of rushed apostolic actions. On the contrary, our actions will reveal a true possession (of God), an enthusiasm (in the etymological sense of the word: to have God within oneself). This will be so because of God's presence itself, (which will be expressed as) a desire that He be God, and that He be God for me, since I am a relay for the manifestation of His glory. (puisque je suis un relais de son rayonnement).

True Christian conversion is none other than a paschal event, that is, a pass-over from religion into faith, from a world dichotomized between the sacred and the profane into a world which is assumed, taken up into the gestalt of the reality of God. In this world of the holy, which is none other than one which is experienced as impregnated with God's gracious, liberating and humanizing presence, the profane can only be perceived as that which is not "of God," the world of sin, the world which stands outside of God's creative and redemptive activity. This world of sin originates when we, humans, keep on sacralizing, that is, when we call holy, or call "of God," certain things or certain people, and attribute to them powers, that we believe, are "of God" -- powers that are used to bargain with God. In fact, in the world dichotomized between the sacred and the profane, the only sin that exists, is that of idolatry: attributing to the finite that which belongs to the infinite, transferring to creatures that which belongs to the Creator, identifying the will of God with that of simple human beings, or worse, with that of institutions.

True Christian conversion takes place when one has crossed over from the world of magic to that of symbols, from a world that uses things and people to placate and assuage the deity, to one that is experienced as capable of sacramentalizing, infleshing, symbolizing the healing and reassuring presence of God. Conversion is hindsight. It is the gracious event into which someone finds him/herself participating as s/he reflects on his/her present life-giving-situation as opposed to the life-grabbing-situation into which s/he was. It is a gracious event wherein one becomes aware of the radical difference between a life which is experienced as grace-filled as opposed to one that is expected to manufacture grace; between a life which is obligation-free as opposed to one which must prostitute itself in multiple indebted acts in order to hold on to what s/he is already desperately clinging to. Conversion is the gracious event in which one finds him/herself participating when one discovers him/herself capable of freely

sharing his/her life as the true gift, the offering which cannot be bought at any price nor repaid with any gift, -- the offering that can only be reciprocated with one that is as obligation-free and as grace-filled. Conversion is the gracious event in which one finds him/herself participating wherein one discovers that what can be truly called life is "of God", and that everything else is not "of God"; only that which is "of God" can be shared freely and can truly be the sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, the spiritual worship. Christian conversion is the ultimate experience of freedom, of liberation, of humanization.

Conversion is the gracious transformation that happens to us in the event of revelation -- a gracious transformation that expresses itself in worship as the welcoming and the sharing of life and as the celebration of life, allowing us as the man of the Gerasenes, "to go off and to proceed to spread throughout the world all that the Lord, in his mercy, has done for us."