

Monday 4th in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 5,1-20): Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes. No sooner did Jesus leave the boat than He was met by a man with evil spirits who had come from the tombs. He lived among the tombs and no one could restrain him, even with a chain. He had often been bound with fetters and chains but he would pull the chains apart and smash the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. Night and day he stayed among the tombs on the hillsides, and was continually screaming and beating himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell at his feet and cried with a loud voice, «What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? For God's sake I beg you, do not torment me». He said this because Jesus had commanded, «Come out of the man, evil spirit». And when Jesus asked him, «What is your name?», he replied, «Legion is my name, for we are many». And all of them kept begging Jesus not to send them out of that region.

Now, a great herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside, and the evil spirits begged him, «Send us to the pigs and let us go into them». So Jesus let them go. The evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs, and immediately the herd rushed down the cliff and all were drowned in the lake. The herdsmen fled and reported this in the town and in the countryside, so all the people came to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the man freed of the evil spirits sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the same man who had been possessed by the legion. They were afraid. And when those who had seen it told what had happened to the man and to the pigs, the people begged Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

When Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been

possessed begged to stay with him. Jesus would not let him and said, «Go home to your people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you». So he went throughout the country of Decapolis telling everyone how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were astonished.

«Come out of the man, evil spirit»

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Today, we find a fragment of the Gospel that might induce someone to smile. Imagining a herd of some two thousand pigs rushing down a cliff and into a lake, is a sort of funny image. But the truth is that those herdsmen did not find any fun in what had happened; they were very angry and begged Jesus to leave their neighborhood immediately.

While the herdsmen's attitude may seem logical, it is actually quite admonishing: for they would have undoubtedly preferred to save their pigs rather than have that demonized man delivered from his evil spirits. That is, first the material goods, which bring us money and ease, instead of a dignified life for a man who does not belong “to our class”. Because the man possessed by the evil spirit was nothing but a person that «night and day stayed among the tombs on the hillsides, and was continually screaming and beating himself with stones» (Mk 5:5).

Quite often we run the risk to cling to what we own and infuriate when we lose whatever material possessions we may have. Thus, we have the farmer despairing when he loses his crop, even if fully insured or the stock market investor who angers if his shares go down. On the other hand, few are those who actually anguish when they see millions of human beings, many of which may live next to us, living in extreme poverty or dying of hunger.

Jesus always placed persons before anything else, even before the law and the powerful people of his time. But, just too often, we only think of us and of what we believe may bring us some happiness, despite the fact that selfishness never has brought any happiness to anyone. As the Brazilian Bishop Dom Helder Câmara would say: «Selfishness is the deepest root of all unhappiness. Your own and that of the whole world».

