

21st Sunday after Pentecost

The Gerasene Demoniac (Lk 8:26-39)



Our Fundamental Vocation

THE GOSPELS RECORD SEVERAL INSTANCES when the Lord Jesus called people to be His followers. At times He called people to leave their homes and livelihoods and follow Him. He called Peter and Andrew, James and John as they were busy fishing *“and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him”* (Mt 4:22). Similarly Matthew walked away from his toll booth and followed Jesus (see Mt 9:9); the other disciples whose calls are not recorded in the Gospels did the same.

Sometimes the Lord called but was refused. The cost of following Jesus was more than some people could bear. To the rich young man who wanted to be perfect Jesus said, *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth” (Mt 19:21-22).

In other instances the Lord raised objections Himself before the would-be follower could discover through failure and discouragement that following Christ meant enduring hardships. Thus *“a teacher of the law came to Him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’”* (Mt 8:19-20). The Lord wanted this teacher of the law to know that following Christ would not provide the comfortable lifestyle he may have been anticipating.

To a procrastinator, however, He gave the opposite advice. *“Then another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead’”* (Mt 8:21-22). The Lord surely wanted followers but He had a different approach based on the readiness of the person before Him. This passage suggests the hurdles that people in any age will face when they consider following the Lord in a radical way: fear of the unknown, self-concern, pre-occupation and attachment to other things all can hinder us from following Christ.

The Vocation of the Gerasene

The Gerasene whom Jesus healed (Lk 8:27-39) wanted to follow Jesus as well; the Scripture says that he *“begged to go with Him,”* but the Lord had another plan for him. *“Jesus sent him away, saying, ‘Return home and tell how much God has done for you.’ So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him”* (Lk 8:38-39).

The Gerasenes had made it clear that they wanted Jesus to go away. He would not force Himself on them. At the same time He wanted to

leave them with a permanent reminder of His presence: their own fellow countryman whom He had delivered. This man had once been a burden to the townspeople; now he would be a blessing.

The apostles were told to go through the world preaching the Gospel; this man's call was to go home and do the same in his village. Was his call by Christ less of a vocation than that of the apostles? It was different, surely, but it was a vocation nonetheless. Some people in the Church tend to think that "vocation" refers exclusively to the calling of a cleric or monastic. The Lord does call some people in every age to serve the Church as priests, deacons, chanters, etc. He does invite others to serve Him as a monk or nun, or as a member of a religious community. But these are not the only people whom He calls to serve Him.

Our Fundamental Vocation

Every person baptized into Christ has a vocation. The essence of that vocation is perhaps best expressed in the First Epistle of Peter: *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light"* (1 Pt 2:9).

There are three important aspects of our universal vocation expressed in this passage. First, our vocation is to **a priesthood**: what the Scripture calls a "royal priesthood." Christ is the true kingly priest and because we have been baptized into Him and sealed in His Holy Spirit we share in His priesthood. Secondly, we share in this priesthood as **members of a people**, the people of God. We are not individually priests, as are the ministers of the altar, but members of a priesthood because of our common union with Christ the High Priest.

This passage also tells us **the reason for this priesthood**: *"that you may declare the praises of"* God. Our vocation as members of the royal priesthood is to share in the Church's call to proclaim the work of God in Christ. Some, like the apostles and evangelizers, are called to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Others, like the Gerasene whom Jesus delivered in the Gospel or the Samaritan Woman, are called to show forth God's love for mankind in their own corner of the world. Still others – most of us in fact – are called to share in the Church's common vocation to proclaim Christ.

How Can We "Proclaim?"

When we think about "proclaiming God's works" we invariably think about speaking or writing. There is a host of other ways by which the

Church makes the Good News present in our world. At the Bridegroom Matins on Holy Tuesday we are reminded that the abilities we have received are often the way in which the Lord makes known to us our way of responding to this call:

"Come, O faithful, let us work eagerly for the Master, for He distributes wealth to His servants; and let us increase the talent of grace, each one according to his ability. Let one adorn his wisdom with good deeds. Let another beautify the celebration of the service. Let someone strong in faith communicate the word to the uninitiated, and another dispense his wealth to the poor. Thus, we shall increase what has been loaned to us and, like faithful stewards of grace, shall be worthy of the Master's joy. O Christ God, make us worthy of that joy, for You are the Lover of Mankind."

Through each of these ways and countless others believers can take their place in the royal priesthood, joining in the Church's mission to declare through word or work *"the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."*

What Happened to the Gerasenes?

The Gospels record that the Lord Jesus sent the man He had healed back home to witness to his neighbors. They do not tell us whether he was successful: was this village converted or not?

We do know that by the third century AD the village was all but deserted. The crag which overlooked the Sea of Galilee, however, had become a place of pilgrimage for Christians seeking to commemorate the healing of the Gerasene. By the fifth century a large monastery serving the pilgrims had been established there. The monastery was expanded in the sixth century but abandoned after a catastrophic earthquake destroyed much of the area in 749. Ruins of the monastery were excavated in the 1970s by the Israeli department of antiquities and were later incorporated into a national park.