

**Reflection for Feb 1, 2021**  
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I have to admit, this Gospel is not one of my favorite ones. Jesus is approached by a man possessed by a legion of demons, curing the man by sending the demons into a herd of swine who dash into the sea and drown!

But the more I read it and reflected on it with the help of several commentaries, I realized that this story did have some Good News in it for us.

This text showed us Jesus taking pity on the suffering of this poor man; he listened to his pleading as he witnessed his mental illness that had terrible physical effects as well. Jesus in his mercy responded in a dialogue, calling out the unclean spirits who had a hold on him. The man claimed that there were many demons, "legion," suggesting evil spirits had possession of him. The man suggested that Jesus send the demons into the herd of swine nearby, "let us enter them." He knew that Jesus had the power to do as he/they asked. Jesus did as he asked and the unclean spirits left the man and entered the swine only to dash into the sea, all 2,000 of them!

Well, that drew a crowd and when they came, they saw the man who had been possessed, clothed and in his right mind, their response was FEAR. Who is this man with such power? And they asked him to leave this area.

But the response of the man was quite different. He asked Jesus if he could stay with him. Jesus told him, rather to go home to his family and tell them what the Lord in his mercy had done for him. So, the man having been freed of these demons that possessed him for so long told everyone in his town the Good News of what Jesus had done. He evangelized the people in his town; perhaps he was one of the first missionaries for Jesus! Because when the people heard about his experience, they were amazed at such wonderful news.

One of the lines in our Ps. 31 for today says it well – the man might have said this:  
Once I said in my anguish "I am cut off from your spirit" O God  
Yet you heard the sound of my pleading when I cried out to you.

The poor man was suffering from his terrible plight, the possession of his mental and physical faculties so he couldn't live a normal life. He saw Jesus, believed in him and his power and pleaded with him to help him.

Isn't this a story for us right now in our current circumstances? Don't we feel as we look at both our situations, dealing with the pandemic and our political divisions that we are struggling with good and evil in various forms?

The pandemic continues to challenge us, with not enough vaccines to go around and now there are new mutations that make it more contagious or so it seems, making the pandemic worse for many, and especially the health care workers.

And then there are significant challenges in the divisions we see in our country politically, in the congress, in the political parties. Is it even possible to work together for the common good as we have for decades?

What is the challenge for us right now?

We are engaged in a dynamic struggle with evil spirits; right now, this struggle between good and evil is absorbing all our attention. To survive we need to be heroic in a way. We need to approach Jesus and plead with him. Lord have mercy on us. Show us how to deal with this struggle in these specific events in our lives. We need to pray for patience and HOPE.

This is a spiritual challenge, a struggle between good and evil that we need to face. Thomas Keating reminds us that Growth is the challenge of the Gospel. The great sin, he says, of the New Testament is to refuse to grow. The spiritual life is dynamic. The Spirit keeps inviting us to new levels of surrender, (to reach a new level of interior freedom) a new level of faith and love and, I might add, TRUST. Trust that God will have mercy, pity on us, just as Jesus had mercy on the man possessed. And we too can then witness to God's saving love with the enthusiasm of the healed man.

Are we up to this challenge to grow? Where is it that God is inviting me/us to Grow at this time?