

The Missing Link in Our Prayers

On Sunday we continued our sermon series based on Father James Martin's book, *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone*, by focusing on prayers of introspection and insight.

1. Warm-up Question: As the weather warms, as more people get their vaccinations, and things begin to return to normal, what's something you're looking forward to doing?
2. Father Jim shared a video message on Sunday in which he commended us for our motto, "All Are Welcome," and talked about how Jesus shared that same value.
 - a. Father Jim said, "Jesus was always reaching out to people on the margins and bringing them in. The movement for Jesus is always from the outside in." In Jesus' time, disciples typically sought out rabbis. By contrast, Father Jim noted, Jesus actively sought out disciples. Why do you think Jesus did that? And what are the implications of that for us?
 - b. Father Jim also said, "Jesus wants to encounter **you**. He wants to meet you **wherever you are**." Do you genuinely believe God longs to have encounters with you right where you are in life right now? Why would God long for you?
3. Father Jim is a Jesuit priest. The Jesuits were founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius taught his followers to "pray the scriptures." By that he meant, when we read a scripture story, we should imagine ourselves in the story and consider what insights God is wanting to offer us from the story for our lives right now. Let's try that with our Gospel passage from Sunday. As we read the passage, think about what character in the story you most identify with. Read Mark 5:1-20, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Here are the characters in the story: Legion (the demon possessed man), Jesus, his disciples, the pigs, and the people of the nearby town. Which of these characters do you most identify with – and why?
 - b. Imagine yourself as Legion. When you look at the story from that angle, what insight might God be offering you for your life?
 - c. Imagine yourself in the role of Jesus in this story. When you look at the story from that angle, what insight might God be offering you for your life?
 - d. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples in this story. When you look at the story from that angle, what insight might God be offering you for your life?
 - e. Imagine yourself as one of the pigs. When you look at the story from that angle, what insight might God be offering you for your life?
 - f. Finally, imagine yourself as one of the townspeople. When you look at the story from that angle, what insight might God be offering you for your life?

4. On Sunday Jeff invited us to imagine ourselves as Legion because we all have our inner demons. Life has a way of making all of us crazy. Our psyche is under constant assault from the stress of work, the stress of money, the stress of family tension, the stress of busted relationships, the stress of painful memories, the stress of shameful thoughts or deeds, the stress of aging parents, the stress of household repairs, the stress of health concerns, the stress of hateful things people say to us or we say to others, etc., etc. If Jesus were to say to us, “What’s your name?” For most of us, an honest answer would be, “My name is Legion, for we are many.”
 - a. As honestly as you can, share with group one of your inner demons, i.e., a thought, issue, memory, fear, or source of anxiety that bedrattles you.
 - b. We all have a tendency to engage in masking activities. It’s easier to avoid, distract, or numb ourselves than to face our inner demons. What’s one your go-to masking activities to avoid thinking about difficult things?
 - c. God’s ideal for us is *shalom* – a Hebrew word that means peace, harmony, completeness, wellbeing, and tranquility. Jeff pictured *shalom* as a tulip garden that flourished despite last week’s heavy snow and freezing temperatures. What visual image best captures *shalom* for you?

5. We can find *shalom* the same way Legion did – by openly naming our demons and processing those haunting thoughts/memories/fears in the presence of Jesus in prayer until they are healed and disappear. Chapter 10 of Father Jim’s book describes what that kind of “processing prayer” looks like. Jeff summarized it in two steps:

Step One: Trust God enough to talk to God about whatever is going on inside you with transparent honesty. Verbalize it by talking aloud.

Step Two: Listen for what the Spirit wants to say back to you by paying close attention to the insights, memories, scriptures, feelings, and thoughts that arise within you as you’re listening. Explore those thoughts. Verbalize them by talking aloud.

Jeff challenged each of us to take 30 minutes this week to practice a “processing prayer” about something small or large that’s creating internal stress.

- a. What issue in your life would you be inclined to pick for a processing prayer?
- b. What causes you to push away from processing prayer? What draws you to it?
- c. If you’ve already practiced a “processing prayer” this week, how did it go? If you haven’t yet, are you willing to commit to it?
- d. Jeff said, “If you get in the habit of engaging in processing prayers, it will change your life.” Do you buy that? Why or why not?

“Let all who are faithful offer prayer to you at a time of distress. You are my hiding place; you shall preserve me from trouble; you shall surround me with songs of deliverance.” Psalm 32:6.

Mark 5:1-20

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. ²And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. ³He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. ⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; ⁷and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' ⁸For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' ⁹Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' ¹⁰He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; ¹²and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' ¹³So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

¹⁴The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ¹⁶Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. ¹⁷Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. ¹⁸As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. ¹⁹But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' ²⁰And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.