

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 1st 2015

This gospel story has much that is unusual about it; there is, for example, quite some question even about where this place actually is. As it stands in the lectionary, Jesus seems to arrive here alone or with companions who play no role in what happens, and there is no teaching, no healing, no forgiveness, no apparent religious outcome, and no conversation with the men who are the victims of the demons. The whole center of the story is that Jesus appears, the demons approach Jesus and make a request, and Jesus responds to them positively. At that point Jesus and the formerly possessed (and probably pagan) men virtually disappear from the narrative.

What are we supposed to learn from this? How are we supposed to change and grow in the light of such a passage? Let's look at the context. In Matthew's gospel Jesus has just calmed a storm, to which the response of the disciples is "What kind of a man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey Him." The verses following today's story have Jesus get back into the boat and return to Cana, where He heals a paralytic whom his friends bring to Him; Jesus starts His work here by forgiving the man's sins.

It would seem that today's gospel is simply one part of Matthew's answer to the disciples' question, "What sort of a man is this?" That response is that Jesus is a powerful man with control over the elements, over demons, over sin, and over people's physical ailments; taken in the larger context of Matthew's whole gospel, it is part of the larger answer, that Christ is both man and God, the Father's true Son.

For us the question is the same, and Jesus is asking for our response: "Who do you say that I am?" --- and "What actual, lived difference does that make in your life?"

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