

Dear Friends,

This morning (Tuesday, September 04, 2007) at Mass, the Gospel passage was from Luke 4:31–37. This passage tells about Jesus preaching at the synagogue in Capernaum, in Galilee, and all of a sudden a man with an unclean spirit started crying out, *“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!”* This scene is both troubling and consoling.

I am troubled by the thought that a man possessed by a demon would find himself in the synagogue at Capernaum at the same time Jesus showed up. Sometimes people today stay away from the Church because they feel they are unworthy of being there. Often people are convinced that their sins would cause scandal and so they should stay away. Other people feel that they have been excommunicated from the Church because of their sins. Besides that, we are often so hard on ourselves that we might even begin to wonder if Jesus himself would shun us because we are sinners. Why did this man show up at the synagogue that day? Perhaps his conscience began to supercede the power of the demon. He must have reached a moment of desperation so great that there was nothing left for him to do but to go and seek some kind of healing, some kind of peace. It was through Jesus’ love that this man found his consolation.

Jesus quieted the demon and ordered it out of the man. In the end, the man was unharmed and he was made whole. This is exactly what Jesus came to do; he came to make us whole. How easily sin defeats us. It leaves us feeling separated, divided, distant, and perhaps, worst of all, unwelcome in God’s house. We have been given the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a way for us to celebrate God’s mercy in our lives. Through the grace of absolution our souls experience the healing mercy of God and we are made whole. However, this sacrament does seem to have lost its appeal over the last several years.

I believe that possessed man in Capernaum found himself in that synagogue partly because of his own despair, but also because of the lure of God's Word which has the authority to touch our souls so deeply that we actually long to hear it. God's Word offers such consolation and hope that we will actually resist the temptation to run away from it in fear. God's Word is calling us to receive healing and mercy.

Our Saturday afternoon confession schedule is helpful, but it clearly is not enough. Therefore, on the last Thursday of each month a monthly Communal Penance service will be added to the schedule. Our first service will be held on September 27, at 7:00 p.m., and it will be held in the daily Mass chapel just across from my office.

The service will begin with a simple prayer, a scripture reading and a brief reflection followed by an examination of conscience. Then, I will go across the hall into my office where a confessional for private confession will be set up. You will be able to go to the sacrament anonymously, or face to face. The service will conclude with a sign of peace and a final blessing.

My hope is that we, as a faith community, will hear the Good News of God's love calling out to us in the sinfulness of our lives, and that we will respond, not in despair, but in the hope for healing. Perhaps there will come a day when the Sacrament of Reconciliation will offer a renewal of faith, not only for us as individuals, but for us as a community of faith healed by the power of God's Word.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel