

Anything but normal

They expected a “normal” day.

The people that gathered in the synagogue at Capernaum knew there would be prayers and readings from the scriptures. At some point, the rabbi would comment on the readings.

And before the service, there were the usual conversations: *How was your week? How's your mother doing? Are you going to the wedding next week?*

Everything as usual...

But things took a turn, the gospel tells us when it came time for the homily. A stranger stood up. And the stranger began to teach, really teach (Mark 1:21-28).

When he spoke, there was a power they weren't accustomed to. He made the words come alive. They made sense. Most of all, they struck the heart.

That probably would have been enough. The young teacher would have earned everyone's respect. A few may have said, "Let's invite this guy back next week!"

But things didn't stop there.

Suddenly, the service was disrupted. There was a commotion that unsettled what was supposed to be a normal Saturday.

There was a man in terrible distress, gripped by some kind of dark power.

Jesus, the "new teacher" quiets the commotion. He heals the man. Unseating and dispelling what had power over him, the man is set free.

Like those folks gathered at the synagogue, we are fairly prepared for what goes on at Mass each week: There are faces we recognize (even behind the masks).

We expect to pray; to hear a message that might get us thinking. We might even expect to have our emotions stirred from time to time.

But like that man, that burdened soul, don't we all need more? Aren't we all in need of a deeper healing?

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that any of us are in the grip of an unclean spirit.

But all of us are confronted, in our lives, by things we cannot control; things that have power over us and that rob us of life.

- Things that like a virus, infect our relationships;
- The memories that haunt us;
- The fears that keep us from doing what we'd love to do;
- The anger that stops us in our tracks;
- Situations and habits that keep us tossing and turning at night.
- Wounds, both old and new, that don't seem to go away.

And in the routine of coming to Mass we sometimes forget that Christ comes to us for much more than an inspirational message.

Christ comes to us as he did that Saturday morning in Capernaum: to heal us from the things that poison us; to set us free from the things that imprison us.

The transformation may not be as sudden and dramatic as at that Synagogue liturgy. Usually it's more gradual. That's OK. Healing is usually a process.

For two millennia Christians have believed that coming together, listening to the stories of faith, sharing the Eucharist and breathing in silence was healing. They found it to be an invitation to open our hearts to a "higher power." They experienced this "power" as accomplishing more than they could have imagined. This "power" could change a life.

So, welcome to Church. May it be anything but "normal."

In whatever space you find yourself in: May Christ meet you. May he heal and set us free.

Fr. Steven Labaire