

When Jesus appointed apostles on the Jewish side of the sea, he gave the twelve authority over demons. The unbelieving scribes accused him of driving out demons by the prince of demons. Jesus countered that “no one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house” (Mk 3:27).

With the beginning of the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus now enters into Gentile territory for the first time. We recall, that on the way as they crossed the water, a great storm tossed the boat about, but Jesus easily calmed the wind and restored peace. Arriving on land, a new storm is brewing in the person of a man possessed by a legion of demons. The man is so strong that people have tried to restrain him with chains. But nothing others do works. He always breaks free of the chains.

Jesus deals with the strong man possessed by demons just as easily as he had the storm. “Unclean spirit, come out of the man!” (Mk 5:8). In fact, the man was possessed by a legion of demons who are fearful that Jesus will no longer let them roam throughout the Gerasene territory. The legion begs to be cast into a herd of swine. Jesus does not take order from the legion of demons. He allows them to go and they choose to enter a herd of 2,000 swine. The swine want nothing to do with the demons and they run headlong into the sea. The sea is a place of chaos and so the demons return to the depths of chaos, a place most fitting for them.

Jesus has set the strong man free. He is sitting at peace with no need to restrain him. He is clothed. When a grown person is baptized, they are set free from the chaos of sin in their lives and clothed with a new white garment. This man is a new creation in Christ and wants to remain with Jesus. After his years of suffering, it must have been such a relief to be at peace. We easily understand why he wants to remain at the side of Jesus, but Jesus sends him on a mission instead. Like John the Baptist who heralded the coming of Jesus to the Jewish people, this man, a gentile, is sent to announce the coming of the Lord to his own family and to his own people.

So, let us return briefly to the saying of Jesus from several chapters earlier. “No one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house” (Mk 3:27). Jesus has not come to plunder, but he has come to proclaim the good news. In healing the man who lashed out with his strength, the demons are gone, no longer binding the man, but buried in the chaos of the sea. Jesus is now free to go beyond the shore and we have every indication this will happen over time from the verse. “Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed” (Mk 5:20). The Decapolis included 10 gentile cities and the surrounding territory so indeed he was given quite a mission.

By virtue of our baptism, we are called like the man that Jesus set free ... to be missionary disciples. As Pope Francis spoke of in the Joy of the Gospel, “Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples” ... So what are we waiting for?” (Evangeliu Gaudium #120)

Source: LaVerdiere, Eugene. The Beginning of the Gospel of Mark, pgs. 128-132.