

Peter M. Antoci  
C7 – Tr 1  
I Kings 19:1-15  
Luke 8:26-30

*The Spiritual Journey*

---

Ever had a day when you felt you were just gonna' flat-out loose it? A day when all the little things that bug you were about to bubble up into one giant, inappropriate outburst? A day when ALL your demons showed their ugly faces?

Well, we have a story like that in today's Gospel. But the Gerasene man whom Jesus heals was someone much worse off than you or I ever get. Seems EVERYDAY was that sort of rage-rimmed HELL for him – until the day he met the Galilean teacher. On that day, our anger-deranged fellow met someone who could look all his rage squarely in the eye and offer him a freedom no one had before. Jesus did NOT deny or dismiss this man's anger. Jesus just asked a simple question of this man's demons: What is your NAME?"

In this direct, forthright act, we learn an important lesson about the spiritual journey: the healing of our hearts begins when we NAME those things we need to be freed from. Those things that hold our hearts in the THRALL of anger – those things – exercise a kind of tyranny over our spirits. That tyranny may even reach DEMONIC proportions if we do not confront and name them. They may indeed become LEGION.

The healing of our souls IS a critical matter. We live in a world beset with demons that are unleashed by rage at any given moment. This is NOT because our anger isn't real, OR EVEN JUSTIFIED. It is because we cloak it, or dress it up in ways that prevent us from facing the matter squarely. We can plainly see the result of cloaked rage that erupts: hate crimes motivated by misplaced grievance, mass shootings even in churches and schools, invasions and bombings between one country and another. So far this year there have been 163 mass shootings in the US. Domestic violence accounts for around 25% all violent crime in the state of Maryland. And this past week we saw two political assassinations and two more attempted.

For some of us, rage takes a different form entirely. It goes underground, and instead of lashing out, we find ourselves lashed-up and tied down. Like those days when we cannot get out of bed, or get enough sleep. Those days when no dish wets our appetite, no beverage slakes our thirst, no friend allays our loneliness, and no one understands our fears. Those are the days when, even if our lips don't say it, our heart cries out: I GIVE UP! ... or in Elijah's words: THAT'S ENOUGH!

Elijah was on the run, a hunted man. He was homeless, friendless, and at the end of his rope. ELIJAH! One of the most powerful and successful prophets of the Hebrew scriptures – empty and depressed; exhausted by his fears and misgivings. His spirit was paralyzed. He was deeply disappointed that God was NOT showing up like Elijah WAS USED TO... Why was God NOT to be found? Not even in the power of wind, earthquake, or fire anymore?

Ever so slowly, Elijah was learning a hard lesson about the spiritual journey: the way forward ALWAYS begins in the quiet of your heart. THAT is the ground – the HOLY GROUND - of resilience. Ignore that quiet and you may be quickly overwhelmed and overwrought. God, and the strength to go on, is IN that still small voice, speaking LOVE AND PEACE with each beat of your heart.

There is a curious thing about Elijah's still, small voice, and the Gerasene's exorcism: both men are sent back onto the exact same journey that they had been living before! To Elijah God says, "Go, return on your way ..." and to the Gerasene, Jesus says "Return to your home..." This is a basic truth of any spiritual path: we return to the exact same lives, but we now know them in a radically different way. After that healing touch or still small voice, life is both the same and NOT the same. The difference is that now, it is NOT too much to keep going, because GOING FORWARD IS where our hearts yearn and reach.

What is it in YOUR heart that YEARNS to be set free? Name it and place it in the hands of Jesus, who even RIGHT NOW is whispering peace to your troubles.