

STATIO MARCH 2011

“What do you want from me, Jesus?”

Read the full text Luke 8:26-39; (see Mt 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20)

Jesus goes to the other side of the lake, enters the land of the Gerasenes, enters a world that is not his by origin, strange in language, strange in culture, where a legion of demons is found: the sub-human. Why does he do that? He was not called, he was not welcomed. Jesus – God with us - crosses a border; he is on mission. Jesus is with a man who is injured, who does not speak but shouts, who is naked, living in a place of death, among the dead, like an animal. People keep him in chains to set him to his death. Jesus enters in the shadows of this setting, enters into chaos and disorder. He passes on to the “other side”.

This reality confronts Jesus and questions Him: “what do you want from me?” Keeping up with this reality is difficult, because Jesus encounters many demons. Jesus always enters reality guided by the Spirit of Life. Jesus, the Son of the Living God, did not come into this world to stay in welcoming places which are socially recognized, pleasant and well known, but rather He enters places which are borders to hell. There are frontiers which make one lose a sense of security because the “other side” questions us by which authority we commit ourselves in the world so much dominated by oppressive powers.

Consecrated persons following Jesus cannot remain only in familiar territories, but must be guided by the Spirit on to the “other side”. It is necessary to perceive “the other side” in different contexts but it will always be along margins, settlements where threats to humanity continue. Naturally we tend to avoid those places and rather settle in secure and known places and houses. But those territories are the favorite dwelling place of the Father.

There are hidden frontiers, boundaries that are not found in maps and are hidden in anonymity. They lead to dark corners where the dignity of millions of creatures is at play. Let us not lose the capacity to be led by the Spirit in order to continue the work of Jesus, of liberation and healing. After Jesus confronted the demons of the Gerasenes, the possessed man appears “seated, fully clothed and sane”; this man has recovered his dignity as a creature. The difficult encounter generated life. Jesus was not thanked but asked to leave because he has destabilized the environment. The world order wants the Gerasenes chained in an excluded territory. Jesus gives us the power to create – like Him and with Him – processes in which the excluded ones of humanity may be relocated to places of life and not of death.

In many contexts, Consecrated Life runs the risk of not realizing in their lifestyle the invitation and the encouraging words of Benedict XVI: *“I encourage you to continue and renew your mission among the poor and with the poor”* (to the Jesuits during their last General Chapter). “Among the poor and with the poor” will require from us a new sensitivity to learn from mistakes and successes in our history to bring Jesus Christ to the poor and marginalized of society; to be sensitive where we put up our convents, our houses of formation and where we show that we really have the passion for Christ and his most threatened creatures.

This is a great challenge for us as Priory and as well for each individual sister. Naturally we are afraid to move out into the unknown, into the unfamiliar. We made our way from our family to religious life and through the long formation process. Now we want to settle down at least in a comfortable place which we can call home. But if we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit of Jesus then it cannot be like this. Jesus was not settled comfortably, his home was the Father under the guidance of the Spirit from his birth in a

stable, his state as refugee in Egypt. Later he tells those who wanted to follow him, that he does not have a place of his own where he can lay his head. He goes to the land of the Gerasenes out of his own free will. He was not forced; it was not a success or anything spectacular in the eyes of the world. His disciples were with him and for sure they were very much afraid and only happy after they had left again. "What do you want from me, Jesus?" is a question we have to ask Jesus and try to answer in faith.

It is right that we live in a house of stones with a good roof and that we have the necessary things for our daily lives and that we care for the necessary maintenance of such a house. But we do not need much more and we have to be ready to be content with less if that comes along with an apostolate which we are doing for the poor and with the poor under the guidance of the Spirit. When we look at our hospitals with the huge number of patients, often in such horrible conditions, not having enough medical personnel, lack of medical materials and still being eager to serve Jesus in these his and our brothers and sisters, then I believe we are ready to be in the land of the "Gerasenes", the land of death, often without thanks. If we are willing to make efforts to open schools, go to the schools to help our youths to learn and to learn about Jesus though this may demand a lot of us, then we are following the Spirit of Jesus. If we stay basically ready to be sent anywhere within our homeland or into another country for the sake of the mission of Jesus then we are followers of Jesus.

There is a fear deep in us, against all that is not familiar for us, that is new, unknown. We do not know whether we shall cope with the assignment, with the people, with the place. How can we live without the internet, where we can feel connected to the familiar? How can we live in a country of different culture, language, climate, food etc. Such a fear is absolutely normal. But the question is how we acknowledge and deal with it: by running away or in the strength of faith in Jesus. Do I really believe that Jesus and His spirit is in me and guiding me in spite of perhaps encountering "legions of demons"? There cannot be internal growth to maturity if one evades these challenges. Each missionary who followed Jesus outside her home country will have to tell her story on her fears, difficulties and darkness. But Jesus is alive and stronger than all and his promise is true: "I am with you always" Mt 28,20

Remember that the Sisters of Nairobi were ready to go to South Sudan to help in a situation where there is no infrastructure, no security, no shops etc. They were not allowed / but they were ready. Test yourself how you would respond to a request to go to South Sudan or Mozambique.... and ask Jesus to help you.

Our Pioneer Missionaries, our Foremothers in the Congregation and in Ndanda Priory were ready and went into the unknown, the "other side" with Jesus, often trembling with fear. Let us ask them to be our intercessors to become worthy of following the poor Christ, to be missionaries among the poor and with the poor, as the Pope said.

Questions

What are places of the other side and did I dare to enter in?

What are the fears that hinder me to follow Jesus to "the other side"?

Can I name the fears and do I want that Jesus heals me from them?

Where does the Spirit of Jesus lead our Priory and how do we respond?

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Inspired by Fr. Toni Catala SJ: *Crossing the Frontiers in Company of Jesus of Nazareth*, UISG 144/2010