Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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"I do believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:25).

Jas 3:13-18; *Mk 9:14-29*

Today's dramatic healing of the possessed boy illustrates Mark's understanding of how the advance of God's Kingdom requires openness and trust on our part.

Jesus and his three closest Apostles, Peter, James and John, are coming down from the mountain of the Transfiguration when today's scene unfolds. It has just been revealed to them that Jesus, God's beloved Son, will accomplish his mission to fulfill the Law and the Prophets by his death in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is clear that his extraordinary power to heal others is tied to his own sacrificial suffering and death.

The other Apostles, who were left behind, have been unable to expel an unclean spirit possessing the boy. Their failure creates despair in the boy's father. The crowd is pressing all around to see what will happen. When Jesus arrives on the scene, he first expresses frustration that there is so little faith present. We recall that in earlier healing stories, Mark notes that for lack of faith, even Jesus was unable to work many miracles when he visited his own hometown of Nazareth.

A circus-like atmosphere has been growing wherever Jesus goes, distracting him from his real mission. In other healing stories, Mark has Jesus taking a blind man and a deafmute apart from the crowds for privacy and, it seems, so he can try rituals using spittle, special words and touching to heal them. After today's encounter, Jesus will withdraw with his disciples to concentrate on building up their faith, not based on sensational signs but on the deeper mystery of his suffering and death in Jerusalem as the one power that can heal and save the world.

Any parent who has ever heard this Gospel story can identify with the anguish of the father. He has lost his son to some invasive power (addiction, mental trauma, a seductive, controlling relationship, brainwashing, etc.) that is slowly alienating and destroying his child. How can he get him back? He is near despair when Jesus arrives, his only hope. When Jesus calls for more faith, the man cries out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!"

Jesus tells his disciples later that there are some cases so deeply rooted, only prayer can accomplish the healing. He is in effect saying, "This is no magic show. You must go deeper to access the grace of the moment, to grasp God's will in this situation." It is a process Jesus himself is apparently confronting as he heads to Jerusalem to perform the deepest exorcism of all, one that will cost him his life.

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