



Fr. Laurence Kriegshauser
5th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B

Jesus heals the brokenhearted. He heals people like Job who feel their nights of suffering will never end. He heals people possessed by demons, of whom there seem to have been many in his time and place. There's a connection between these two forms of human misery. Illness was not part of God's plan for man, nor was death. These were brought into the world when man, the lord of creation, turned against his Creator to himself. His turning from God was a turning from the fullness of life God wanted for man. It was the human race that brought misery into the world.

Human defiance of God is a spiritual act, the choice of a created person to reject his Creator's love. That spiritual act is shared by another group of creatures who are pure spirits. Scripture teaches that God created angels who at the moment of their creation had the free choice to acknowledge or reject their creator. Those who chose to reject God are the demons, who hate God and try to persuade men and women to join in their rebellion. When men reject God they join the company of the demons, who gain a kind of possession over them. This spirit of evil, this rejection of divine love is what tears the world apart and can only be healed by Jesus. The evil of the demons cannot be healed because they made their choice against God with full knowledge of what they were doing, but man who does not share this knowledge can still turn back to God.

We are all sick insofar as we share in the rejection of divine love. That is why Job is such a powerful figure: he is a representative of humanity burdened by the consequences of its sin and crying out for mercy. We have to let ourselves experience the existential misery of a Job if we are to appreciate Jesus as a savior. He did not come to call the healthy but the sick, not the just but the sinner. It's when we feel the misery of our sinful state that we are open to the message of the healer.

People flocked around the door of the house where Peter was staying, and Jesus "cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons."

When the crowds had gone, he slept a couple of hours and "very early before dawn" went off to pray, communing with his Father, drawing strength from the Father for his ongoing mission. Hearing that everyone is looking for him, he goes to a different place to preach the Good News and cast out more demons.

We may not think so readily today in terms of diabolic possession, but we certainly know what it means to be dominated by the spirit of rejection of love. Goethe has his devil Mephistopheles say, "Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint": "I am the spirit that always negates," a spirit that always rejects goodness, always says No to God. The Good News that Jesus preached and verified by his



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miracles is that the power of spiritual evil has been broken. Human beings have been liberated from the No to God from which they cannot free themselves. The Jesus who drove out the demons in Galilee would definitively destroy their hold over man at his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. He is alive and present to us in his sacraments. As he offers himself to the Father again on this altar for the forgiveness of sins, he acts in us who bring to him our misery and ask his mercy. He heals the brokenhearted, he raises the lowly, the wicked he casts to the ground. May we open our hearts to his forgiving love and live by the Spirit of love that he grants us.