

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue
Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.
Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever.
They immediately told him about her.
He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.
Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset,
they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons.
The whole town was gathered at the door.
He cured many who were sick with various diseases,
and he drove out many demons,
not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn,
he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.
Simon and those who were with him pursued him
and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you."
He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages
that I may preach there also.
For this purpose have I come."
So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons
throughout the whole of Galilee.

Homily Transcript – *The Mystery of God's Grace*

In today's gospel from the first chapter of Mark, we get some sense of the energy and the vitality of Jesus' early days in ministry. It begins with this story of Jesus entering the house of Simon and Andrew. Archaeologists have discovered that town, Capernaum, that they believe is the actual site. They've done excavations and there are markings there. I love that historical detail that if you ever have the opportunity to go over to the Holy Land, you can visit that actual site where today's Gospel took place.

Jesus enters it and the first of many miracles takes place: this healing of Simon's mother-in-law. When word spreads throughout the whole little town of Capernaum—as Mark tells the story the whole town is gathered at the door because everybody's got something or knows someone who needs to be healed; physically, emotionally or spiritually. Mark goes out of his way to connect the physical healings with the spiritual and emotional healings of the driving out of demons.

In this month of January, at the beginning of a New Year, it's time for us to begin again, to put a new face to our journey with the Lord. What are New Year's about or what is a spiritual journey

about if it isn't going deeper into the mystery of God's grace? As a priest it's my privilege to hear many confessions and I'm surprised—or perhaps not surprised—at the number of people who begin their confession by saying, "Father it's the same old sins." And sometimes I say to them, "So you're tired of the old sins? You want new ones?"

Sometimes we get frustrated because we don't sense that we're making enough progress. The adage in the 12-step program is, "Progress, not perfection." Let's recognize the fact that we're never going to get to a place where we're not going to need to go to confession. We're never going to get to a place where we can walk in and we can say, 'Bless me father, I haven't sinned. It's been a year since my last confession.'

We are people continuously in need of God's grace and the irony is that the closer we get to God, the more we realize God's grace at work in our life; the more we're able to see ourselves as we are, unencumbered. We become more conscious of our imperfections, not less conscious. The further we move from the Lord, the less conscious we are of sin. The closer we come to the Lord, the more aware we are of our own human imperfections.

Our first reading today is the story of the call of Samuel from first Samuel chapter 3. I think it's emblematic of all of us because the Lord has to call Samuel again and again and again and again, before Samuel is awaked to the truth that this is the Lord calling him. So often we're deaf to the Lord's calling and we just don't understand. The Lord calls us in many different ways doesn't He? Sometimes he calls us—and I think this is when we think of the Lord's calling us, we think, 'Okay I enter into deep prayer, praying the rosary and receiving Holy Communion and meditating after communion and making a holy hour and I feel this prompting in my heart and I know it's the Lord.'

Certainly that's one way the Lord speaks to us, but sometimes it's our spouse or the members of our family sit down and say, 'You know I have to tell you, when you do such and such it really bugs me.' Then we get defensive and we say, 'What are you talking about? Let me tell you about the 10 things that you do that really bug me.'

Well maybe the Lord is speaking to us in those people around us who are trying to alert us to obnoxious behavior. We don't want to hear that. Sometimes the Lord speaks to us in financial difficulties. Certainly he speaks to us in relationship difficulties. Could the Lord be speaking to us in the midst of losing a job or when we experience a great disappointment?

The paradigm that I suggest we adopt is that the Lord is always speaking to us. The Lord is always trying to draw us closer to Himself. It's not to say that he wants bad things to happen to good people, but it is to say that when bad things happen to good people, we can trust on the fact that the Lord is going to bend those circumstances to change us and to mold us and to make us more to His liking.

This New Year is about change; it's not about changing our hairstyle or the hair on our faces or our clothes. It's something much deeper. The Lord is calling us to listen.

A number of years ago I had one of those painful revelations where it became very apparent that there were things in my life that I was not addressing and I wrote this prayer poem that I share with you:

God's Gentle Gaze of Love

God of Light, from Whom nothing is hidden,
Lover of my soul, Who desires only what is good,
Draw me into Your healing gaze,
For I squirm before the fear of facing You, of hearing You,
Of being seen and known such as I am.

Speak, Lord, when Your servant is too busy to listen!

For I cannot stop - No, I refuse to stop my commotion
In motion wrought by an overly busy brain.
Yes, my eternal soul longs to rest in Your radiance,
And yet I resist You, Lord of my longing,
Choosing familiar habits, well trod paths,
Short cut choices that wed me to perpetual pain.

Please speak, Lord, Your servant must learn to listen!

Stop me grace-fully, Lord!
Open my ears to the song of Your Voice,
Redirect my gaze from myself to Yourself,
From my thieftom to Your kingdom,
From who I am to who You create me to become.

Please speak, Lord, Your servant is praying to listen!

Bend my will away from my rejections and projections

To Your oh-so- gentle persuasions.

Draw me to rest in Your gaze, naked without shame,
To trust in Your call and accept my wholly imperfection,
Being seen - known - called gently by my name,
Forever loved - by You!

Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening!

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