

Talk #2 "Encountering Jesus Amidst the Chaos and Pain"
St. Mary of Sorrows Historic Church

In the Gospel of Mark, we hear that Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him as he climbs Mount Tabor to pray. There, he is transfigured before them. The Apostles see his true glory as the God of Life and King of Heaven and Earth.

Looking on in awe, Peter utters perhaps the biggest understatement of human history when he says. "It is good that we are here." It's more than good! They are transfixed by the dazzling appearance of our Lord, and we can only imagine that words fail to fully capture what they are experiencing on that mountain. They are seeing something that no one has ever seen before, the glorious vision that the angels and saints will see in heaven. Maybe, "It's good that we are here," is all Peter could say. Anything would be inadequate.

After the Transfiguration, Jesus and the three Apostles come down Mt. Tabor and their euphoria is taken from them. At the bottom of the mountain, they enter into a chaotic scene. The other Apostles are with a father and his possessed son. The man had brought his son to be freed.

Through the power that Christ had given them, the Apostles had cast out demons before. When he sent them out to the towns and villages to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand, curing the sick and casting out demons as a sign of God's power, they were overwhelmingly victorious. When they returned from their mission, Jesus said, "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky" (Lk 10:18)

But at the base of Mount Tabor, that divine power was lacking in them. The Apostles were helpless against the demon. They could not free the boy from the grip of evil.

Here I will pick up with the divinely-inspired words of St. Mark's Gospel:

When [Jesus, Peter, James and John] came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. Immediately on seeing him, the whole crowd was utterly amazed. They ran up to him and greeted him.

He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"

Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I have brought to you my son possessed by a mute spirit. Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they were unable to do so."

The argument with the scribes comes about due to the failure of the Apostles. We imagine that the scribes are accusing the Apostles of being false prophets. The Lord did not work through them as they claim. They are frauds.

As they are his disciples, their failure also reflects poorly on Jesus. He is the one who called them into ministry, and the scribes are ready to pounce. For some time the religious leaders of Jerusalem have been jealous of our Lord. He rebukes them for their sinfulness and calls them hypocrites. He speaks with an authority they cannot. He performs miracles that they are unable to. He draws great crowds.

Now, they find a weakness to exploit – a weakness in his chosen disciples. Perhaps God has abandoned them. Perhaps God was never with them. Perhaps their rabbi, Jesus, is a charlatan...

Now it is Christ's turn to act. He has just come down from his glory on Mount Tabor and walked into this mess. A boy is in the grip of evil, and his Apostles are arguing with the scribes. And while they fight, no one is helping to save the child.

[Jesus] said to them in reply, "O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me."

They brought the boy to him. And when he saw him, the spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions. As he fell to the ground, he began to roll around and foam at the mouth.

Then he questioned his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "Since childhood. It has often thrown him into fire and into water to kill him..."

The boy has been possessed from his youth - a victim of the devil since a young age. From that time, the Evil One is bent on destroying him – throwing him into fire and water. Sending him into convulsions.

No doubt the boy feels helpless like his father. Who can stop his torment? Who can break the power of evil that grips him and controls him?

No doubt this boy feels like an outcast in his village. How would he fit in? Who would be around a child prone to such fits and convulsions? Likely, he feels alone, abandoned, helpless, unworthy of love.

...This may sound familiar to you. Attacked by the devil through his agents. Helpless against the pain and suffering you endured. Isolated. Alone.

You are not possessed by a demon, but you have been wounded by evil.

Like the boy and his Father, you long to be set free.

And like the Apostles and the scribes at the foot of the holy mountain, the leaders of the faith seem helpless, too. Among them there is confusion and arguing and talking and so much that seems so useless to you. And you continue to suffer.

At this point the boy's Father pleads to Jesus, "*[I]f you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*"

Jesus said to him, "If you can"? Everything is possible to one who has faith."

How challenging are Christ's words to the father? Everything is possible to those who have faith. He came to the Apostles in faith, but they failed him. His son is still suffering in the grip of evil.

We all know that it is much easier to tell someone to believe than it is to believe yourself. It is especially difficult for someone to have faith when their trust has been destroyed by a man who is supposed to be a model and example of that same faith.

How can you trust when it seems hopeless? How can you trust when your faith has been stolen?...

The glorious truth about faith, though, is that it is not just an act of the will...

Faith is a gift that is given to us at our Baptism. Like hope and charity, it is a supernatural and theological virtue we receive when we are welcomed as God's children, washed free from original sin and made a temple of the Holy Spirit. Faith is given to us to work in and through us.

Of course, we don't have to act on the theological virtues. And sometimes we can't because of forces beyond our control.

But in those moments when we can, when we hand ourselves over to the one who creates us in love, the one who has the power to share that love, ... when we give him just an opening – just a hint of faith ... we open the door to his glory...

...The boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!"

And we do the same. "We believe, Lord. Help the parts of us that do not want to believe, that cannot believe because we cannot hope, because we cannot trust."

Our Lord will take what little scrap of faith we can muster to offer, the remnant of the faith that he supplies us, and like the miracle of the loaves and fish, he multiplies it in our and expand it throughout our souls.

It may not feel that way – faith is silent and still. The change in us may be imperceptible at first. But it is real. And it is life-giving. And it begins to set us free. It begins to take away the power of evil, the isolation of the devil's lies about our shame. It allows hope to enter – hope in God's power, hope in our redemption.

Because all it takes is a little faith for Christ to work. In the Gospels, there are times when Jesus enters a village only to be found helpless. He cannot perform mighty deeds because the people of the village refuse to believe, refuse to have faith.

But we have faith. He gives it to us.

And for the faith that we lack, we cry out with the Father, "I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief."

...Knowing the man's faith, Jesus acts.

[Jesus] rebuked the unclean spirit and said to it, "Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him again!"

One of the tricks of the evil one is to make us believe that he and God are on equal footing. That the battle against good and evil is a fair one.

It is not. The Holy Trinity are infinite and omnipotent. They have always been and always will be.

All things visible and invisible – from the mightiest angel and the largest star to the one-celled organism and the particle of vapor – all are created by God and sustained by his will.

Lucifer was the most glorious of the angels before he fell, but he is and always will be a creature, held into being by the power of God. Therefore, he can be cast out of heaven by the Archangel Michael, who was not from the highest order of angels as Satan, but instead was from the lowest ring of angels. But Michael was doing God's will, so he could throw Satan down by God's strength, just as David toppled the giant Goliath and slayed him.

There have been, there are, and there will likely be times in your life when you feel as if there is no way that you can defeat the darkness that engulfs you.

With Christ, you can. Nothing is impossible for God. He is the maker and ruler of all. So we stay close to him. We seek him out. We beg for his mercy and power.

Jesus commanded, ***"Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him again!"*** Shouting and throwing the boy into convulsions, it came out. He became like a corpse, which caused many to say, ***"He is dead!"***

As we do battle with our wounds, with our sorrow, with the devil's lies that tell us that we are unworthy and filled with shame....handing our suffering over to Christ, ... handing over our control ... is a frightening proposition. It means leaving ourselves vulnerable.

Like the boy convulsed by the demon leaving his body, it will always be jarring as you struggle to hand your terror over to Jesus. The evil one wants to cling to you. He will always put up a fight when you approach Jesus...

But he is no match for Jesus. When we encounter our Lord, there is peace. There is freedom.

... Jesus took [the boy] by the hand, raised him, and he stood up.

Our Lord and Savior desires to raise you up. Unlike the case of the possessed boy, it will not be instantaneous. It will come in stages. It will require patience. It will require persistence. It will require trying time and time again to allow him to take us by the hand.

But Our Lord is as patient as he is powerful. He knows the wounds you have endured and the freedom that has been robbed from you. He waits for you, loving you, guiding you, resting his hand upon you, steadying you as you continue to battle, continue to struggle.

When he entered the house, his disciples asked him in private, "Why could we not drive it out?"

He said to them, "This kind can only come out through prayer."

The Apostles were dismayed at their weakness. They wanted to know how to know the power of God, how to let his glory flow through them.

Jesus provided the simple, yet profound answer: ... prayer.

We think of prayer as a conversation with Jesus, and very often, it is. We plead with him for strength and freedom, we ask him to increase our faith, we cry out to him in our anger and pain. We speak from the heart. We speak from the depth of our souls, where only he can hear.

But prayer can also be silent. It can be done without our words.

St. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit prays for us, asking what we do not know to ask for, pleading what we cannot – and sometimes dare not – ask for ourselves because we are afraid of what the answer is.

And so we rest before the Lord, aware of his presence, basking in his hidden glory. We sit in silence with him as we would with a good friend – one who knows us, one who loves us. A friend that we can trust.

And in that silence, as we grow more comfortable with him – more comfortable resting in his presence – as we do this, we may not feel like anything is happening within us....

But it is. Our Lord is drawing us to himself. He is strengthening us. He is transforming us. He is loving us perfectly. Loving us as we are. Loving us in our brokenness. Loving us in our pain.

And ever slow slowly, ever so patiently, every to gently, he leads us to freedom, one step at a time, one inch at a time....

This afternoon, as we gather together in this beautiful chapel, we rest before the Lord.

Do not worry about what to say. Do not worry about how to pray. Simply rest, as you can, in his presence.

He is here, in all of his glory and power. He is here, pure love that desires to set your hearts aflame. He is here, for you.

Rest with him.