



1 February 2009

Dear Parishioners,

In today's Gospel the people say, "Here is a teaching that is new," in response to Jesus' deliverance of the man with the unclean spirit. And it is a lesson that surprises me as the unclean spirit throws the man into convulsions and comes out of him with a loud cry. What can this mean for us?

If the presence of Jesus is going to make inroads and have an impact, we need to learn to face inside what's really going on: what torments our lives and leaves us feeling bound. Like the man with the unclean spirit standing before Jesus in the synagogue, if I really want Christ inside my life then I need to 'come clean' and honestly face myself. And I do believe we fear such self-confrontation.

One of my responsibilities at the monastery was directing men in a 30-day retreat program that was offered 3-4 times a year. Invariably within the silence of the cloister—which would act like a hothouse of sorts—things inside the retreatants could get a little noisy and messy as they faced themselves and what was really going on: the evasions, fears, resentments, questions, whatever. Yet I would tell them that this was necessary. It is life's lesson and the teaching of the Gospel. The 7th century Syrian monk Isaac of Nineveh put it well when he wrote:

***Silence will illuminate you in God...
and deliver you from the phantoms of ignorance.***

I remember asking one of the retreatants—a college student named Matt—how it was going, and he said: "It's getting a little gnarly inside!" Yet, he stayed with it and found the retreat to be transformative. The lesson here is that we must be willing to face what keeps us from freely and willingly letting Christ inside: the same Christ who enters the synagogue and teaches in today's gospel.

May we learn.

Father Tim Clark