

Reflection for Oct. 8, 2021

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In our reading from the prophet Joel, the people are lamenting a plague of locust that has devastated the crops and the land. They are grieving and expressing their sorrow. Joel urges them to mourn, to repent and to cry out to God for assistance. There will be no autumn harvest, no wine and no food for celebrating.

As the people in the first reading, Jesus had every reason to lament or grieve because the religious leaders refused to accept him and believe in him as the one sent from God. They refused to believe in the God he was revealing.

In the Gospel, Jesus has cast out a demon- a good thing- but the hearts of some who saw this were hardened and closed to its meaning. They put the worst possible interpretation on Jesus's action, saying his power came from the prince of demons and not from God. Still others wanted further signs before they would believe. Jesus routing out demons, this liberation of people and society, is the strongest possible sign that Jesus' power is of God and that God's kingdom is breaking into the world. What further signs could be asked for?

There is a gap between the leaders and the people and the leaders and Jesus. The leaders keep asking Jesus about his credentials and the people are constantly praising and thanking God for all that is being done among them through Jesus. Did Jesus lament this lack of acceptance on the part of the religious leaders?

Jesus asserts that he casts out demons by the finger of God, the power of God's spirit within him and so God's reign is present among them.

There is no middle ground, no neutrality. If you do not side with Jesus you are in the army of Satan.

Once a person has been healed, liberated, from the power of an evil spirit, the space has to be filled with the spirit of Jesus otherwise the evil spirit may return. What about us?

In modern day language we might think of demons as areas in our lives where we are not free. Examples are obsessions, fixed ideas, compulsions, emotional confusion, complexes, inability to think clearly, unconscious or conscious feelings of hatred, bitterness, jealousy, fear and so on.

Demons can be personal or systemic. As individuals, as a country or a community, we might live out of unconscious biases ... racist or homophobic attitudes that prevent us from being open and inclusive of all people and that allow us to stay comfortable in our own little group.

Do you or I or we have any of these or other "demons" that may need casting out? Do we harbor negative images of God? Do we have attitudes that disturb our thinking and make us unpeaceful? Maybe we have images of ourselves that don't correspond to God's image of us. When we look at others, is there anything that distorts our view from seeing them as God sees them?

"Demons" come in many forms and Jesus wants to heal us individually and as a people as he did the man in today's Gospel. As he so clearly told us, "I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance."

Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

Let us pray for openness to the power of God at work in us for our healing and wholeness.