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## Mk 5:1-20 Second reading Isaiah 65:1-5

### Legion

This sermon has four points: the man, the Romans, the people of the land and the Kingdom.

#### The man

The man in this story is dangerous, demon-possessed and unclean. For Jews, graves are unclean (Num 31:19) and so are pigs (Lev 11:7). All this shows that the man is not a Jew but a gentile. The region east of the Sea of Galilee, Decapolis (vs 20), was a gentile area.

In vs 7 the man refers to God like gentiles do: 'Most High God' is a title from Genesis 14:18-20 and Daniel 3:26 and 4:2. It shows that God is known among the gentiles, although they accept that other gods also exist.

The man's response to Jesus' arrival is strange: 'Leave me alone.' He feels Jesus' love and acceptance, but he tries to avoid it. He typically resists being helped.

Yet Jesus does not go away, and as a result the man's fear is replaced with joy, his shame with hope, his self-destruction with order and his menace with faith. Spiritual renewal can bring personal, social and political healing.

At the end of the story Jesus leaves him behind: the seed has fallen in good soil and will bear fruit. He can be a witness to others.

#### The Romans

The demons are called Legion, which is a reference to the Roman legions of soldiers, and thus to Rome as the occupying power. Israel and the surrounding lands had been occupied by the Romans. The story is full of violence. Mark paints the Roman power in dark colours, and he compares the Roman soldiers to pigs.

Although he is in gentile territory, Jesus is fearless. The Gospel should be heard everywhere. He tackles Satan on his home ground, reaching out to people. Elsewhere he associates with tax collectors and speaks friendly to soldiers. He comes to bring mercy and salvation, and he is non-violent. The demons, on the other hand, destroy themselves. Satan tends to destroy his allies, cf. C.S. Lewis' Screwtape.

#### The people

The locals act out Isaiah 65. In vs 17 these decent citizens respond not better than the possessed man: 'Leave us alone.' Many had accepted the Roman occupation. Many profited economically from the flourishing trade...

Do the owners of the pigs care more about their pigs than about a human? Or are they just scared of God's holiness? We recognise this response in people around us: 'Don't disturb!'

But Jesus wants to disturb the status quo of occupation, possession and tyranny.

#### The Kingdom

This story shows us the Kingdom of God in action. It is non-violent. Human beings are central. Creation is restored and the powers are thrown out.

How do we respond? Humans have infinite value for Jesus.

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