

Sunday, August 20, 2023

#Homily by Father Karl Daigle

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2023

Bread for the Journey

In his song “Hey Whiskey,” the country music singer Tim McGraw reflects on his own journey with the abuse of whiskey. He expresses the lament, “Hey whiskey, what did I ever do to you?” He felt betrayed by alcohol. After all, he had made it his first love. He had given it his heart and soul. He had given it his veneration and devotion. And in return, he ultimately experienced the heartache of distorted perspective, compromised integrity and self-control, and hurting loved ones through his speech. He almost lost the most important woman in his life, his beloved wife Faith Hill.

In a moment of obvious disillusionment and searing honesty, he sings this about whiskey: “I held you up, you let me drown. Nah, you ain’t worth the hurt, so why can’t I put you down?” These words capture the torment that we can experience when we are in the clutches of our inner demons, whatever they happen to be. We can experience this torment both by giving our inner demons free rein and when we begin to fiercely oppose them. They usually do not go away without a fight.

There are various types of inner demons that can torment us. I would like to reflect on three. The first type of inner demon that can torment us is our thought patterns. Our thought patterns may be dominated and poisoned by a spirit of criticism, selfishness, and self-pity. We may be consumed by thinking that is self-defeating, worst-case scenario, and hopeless. The focus of these thought patterns can be ourselves and/or other people.

The second type of inner demon that can torment us involves our deeply ingrained bad and sinful habits or addictions. Neither is good for us personally or spiritually. They both eventually torment us. The best way to distinguish between the two is that our addictions have much more power over us. We are more likely to continue, even with all the pain and consequences it brings into our lives.

The third type of inner demon that can torment us involves the power we give to other people in our lives. We are enslaved to their expectations and demands. We allow their view of us to determine our happiness and our sense of self-worth. We continually see ourselves through their eyes instead of through our own eyes and the eyes of God. We have not developed and fortified our own personal and spiritual inner core.

Every one of us in this church has inner demons. None of us are immune. Some may be more obvious or dramatic than others, but we all have them. If you don’t believe me, all we need to do is ask the people we live and work with. I often joke that our loved ones and friends ought to be the ones who confess for us in the sacrament of reconciliation and attend counseling sessions with us. They see us in a way that we are often blind to or resistant to admit. They encounter our inner demons up close and personal. You see, our inner demons have a way of not only tormenting us but also tormenting the people around us. This is especially true if we have a strong spirit of pride, anger, control, or a lack of control. We also cannot underestimate how we torment others when we have a strong spirit of insecurity, fear, and perfectionism.

Whatever our own inner demons may be, we have not been left orphaned. Our deliverer is revealed in today’s Gospel. With a sense of awe and wonder, we hear that Jesus delivered the Canaanite woman’s daughter from a real demon. If Jesus can deliver someone from a real demon, we can rest assured that he can set us free from our inner demons caused by our wounded and broken ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

The first step in deliverance is turning to Jesus and to keep turning to Jesus. Using Tim McGraw’s song as an example, we can pray something like this: “Jesus, help me to love You and Your will more than whiskey.” If whiskey

is not our issue, we can use the same simple prayer and insert our own personal struggle. We can also turn to Jesus and pray something like this: “Jesus, You, are my deliverer. In your great love and mercy towards me, please deliver me from my deep bondage to (fill in the blank).” As Christians, we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Savior. By praying this way, we are affirming our faith in His power to save us. As you can tell from our Gospel reading, a living faith often compels him into action.

In addition to praying to Jesus in this manner, we can experience growing deliverance from our inner demons indirectly by being steadfast in our daily prayer, the reception of the sacraments, and immersing ourselves in the truth of the Scriptures and our Catholic Christian faith. As we habitually do these things, we develop and fortify our spiritual and moral strength and endurance. The more we quench our hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ, the less we will hunger and thirst for those things that create and strengthen our inner demons.


Another important step in our deliverance from our inner demons is to bring them out of the dark and into the light. Sin and things that are not good for us tend to grow and thrive in the darkness of silence. There is tremendous spiritual power and healing that comes through talking about our inner demons. This can be so scary. It can make us feel so exposed and vulnerable. Yet, in doing so, we allow our inner demons to be exposed to the light of love, grace, mercy, and truth.

We can talk about it in different ways. Some of the less intimidating ways we can articulate our struggles are through writing, poetry, or some type of personal or creative expression. If we choose to write, we can directly address Jesus with our conflicted and tormented thoughts and feelings. If we feel like we are ready to be even more vulnerable, we can bring it to the light by talking to a confessor, counselor, spiritual director, or some trusted persons. Depending on the nature of the struggle, and the type of people in our lives, it might be best to bring it to someone other than family members. Even with the best intentions, loved ones often lack the type of objectivity that helps us to feel free enough to be fully transparent. There are exceptions, but it is important to be discerning.

Talking about our inner demons helps expose the lies, half-truths, and stinking thinking, that often support and perpetuate their existence. By talking to someone, we get in touch with our blind spots, and we often discover that we have more options and opportunities for growth, healing, and conversion than previously believed. One of the most important benefits of talking with another person is that we discover that there are many other people who share our inner demons. We no longer feel like an island unto ourselves. We no longer feel like the biggest sinner, or loser. We no longer feel like we are so different from everybody else. There is a real liberating and strengthening power in this personal epiphany.

In the X-Men movie “Days of Future Past,” the older version of Professor Charles Xavier connects with the younger version of himself across the span of time and space. He did this in an attempt to change the course of history. The only problem was the 1973 version of Charles Xavier was in a dark and lost place in his life. Due to personal misfortune and relational loss, he had lost his passion for life and for helping other people. He turned to whiskey to numb the pain and to try to get by. In an attempt to reach him, the older version of Professor Charles told his younger self: “Charles, just because you stumble and lose your way doesn’t mean you’re lost forever. Charles, I need you to hope again.” The younger version of Professor Charles was able to rally himself in a manner that ultimately prevented devastating wars between humans and mutants in the future.

As we struggle with our own inner demons, it is important to remind ourselves and be reminded by others that we, too, can rally ourselves. By continually turning to Jesus Christ as our Deliverer, we can change the course of our own earthly and eternal future. In the process, we might influence the earthly and eternal future of those around us. As God personally proclaims to us through the prophet Jeremiah: “For I know well the plans I have in mind for you. Plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope.

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