

Homily based on the readings from July 2, 2025 (Genesis 21.5, 8-20a;
Matthew 8.28-34)

Although there are many noteworthy aspects of today's Gospel reading, perhaps the most remarkable is the sentence at the very end:

Thereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus,
and when they saw him they begged him to leave their district.

Having learned about the miracle Jesus had performed, the local population responded neither with gratitude nor with anger. They simply implored him to go away.

It would be easy for us – sitting here in relative comfort and safety – to denounce the townspeople for their lack of understanding. Could they not recognize who was standing in front of them? Was this miracle not enough to establish his authenticity? If we are being honest with ourselves, though, we have to acknowledge that the villagers' reaction is not quite as outlandish as it first appears. Not only would most of us

likely have done something similar in their place, but in many ways our own society engages in behavior that is far worse.

First of all, we need to consider the historical background of this situation. With the benefit of four Gospels, two creeds, and countless other sacred texts, it seems obvious in retrospect how everything would work out for Jesus and his followers. The same was *not* true at the time these events were actually unfolding. The Gadarenes were dealing with forces they had never previously encountered – or could even possibly imagine. They did not even have the benefit of the prophecies and wisdom of the Jewish tradition – as we can see from the fact that members of their community owned and tended herds of swine.

Another point, that is even more important for us to keep in mind, is that many people today continue to demand that Jesus go away – albeit in a subtler fashion. I will not name any names, but the loudest voices in contemporary America – political organizations, media conglomerates, educational institutions – are single-mindedly devoted to expunging any

vestige of Christianity from our public discourse. To some extent, this impulse may be based on a misguided understanding of personal liberty – but at its core it represents a willful and determined effort to banish Christ himself from our communal life. Unlike the Gadarenes, people today have every opportunity to know Christ’s true identity – yet far too many still make the conscious decision to send him away.

And so, as we reflect upon our own place in the world, each of us has a choice to make: are we going to join the joyful crowd welcoming Christ into our city, the screaming mob calling for his execution, or the frightened villagers begging him to depart? Those are really the only three options. What matters, of course, is not what we say we will do from a safe distance, but what we actually do when our decisions have real consequences. Pray that God will give each of us the *strength*, the *courage*, and the *wisdom* to make a choice we will never come to regret.