

In the movie Wall Street Charlie Sheen asks the beautiful Daryl Hannah, "What do you want out of life?" She responds, "World peace or a Turner." I nearly leapt out of my seat till I realized she meant a painting by the English impressionist.

"What do you want out of life?" is a question which hangs around today's Gospel. More specifically, "What do you want out of Jesus?" Do you want him to cure a fever, heal the sick, or expel demons? Just what do you want?

"Everyone is looking for you," the apostles tell him, and it's still true today. Everyone looks for Jesus. Everyone wants to get closer. But there are two motions in the Gospel today, a movement toward and a movement away. There is an attraction and there is a repelling.

There are people possessed by demons. They know who Jesus is. Even the demons have drawn close enough to Jesus to know who he is, but Jesus repels them, he drives them away.

The crowd presses closer. They are attracted by him. But the closer they get the farther Jesus goes, till he gets up early in the morning, goes to a desert place to get alone, and prays.

Have you ever had that experience with someone? You meet a person who attracts you and you want to become better acquainted. But the closer you try to get the more you drive the other away. The more you try to be likable the less the other becomes interested. And the mystery of the person increases. Or maybe it's been like that with God. The more you try to get through the farther away God seems.

What did the people do wrong? All they wanted was to get closer to Jesus. Or is that what they wanted? Just what did they want out of Jesus? For them, he was a miracle worker, nothing more. A magician. They liked his tricks, they marveled at his power, they wanted to see more. But Jesus was more than a magician. He was the Redeemer. And if the people couldn't see beyond his miracles to the love He gave them, Jesus withdrew. He loved them so much he withdrew.

My brothers and sisters, what do we want out of Jesus? Do we simply want him to rescue us from our concerns? Or do we want Him to love us, even when it hurts?

There is a part of Catholicism which is similar to the miracles of Jesus. There is a part of our faith which lures us to dwell on things too marvelous to understand. We are intrigued by crying statues and secret letters. We marvel at the blood of St. Januarius which coagulates each year on his feast. Some Catholics speak in tongues, some carry relics which cure diseases. Some pray devotional prayers to a saint in the sure belief that whatever they ask will be granted absolutely. There is a part of Catholicism which is similar to the miracles of Jesus. There is a part--authentic and wonderful to behold--but a part which will tempt us to treat him like some genie in a bottle. There is a part which will tempt us to make him do our will. And the closer we try to come, the farther away he will go. If all we want are our miracles we will never get close to Jesus.

Miracles are signs of Christ's love for us. They must never induce us to make Jesus do our will. They must inspire us to want only his.