

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jan 21st 2017

This slimmest of Gospel fragments sends us looking for clues as to what the meaning might be.

The early responses to Christ's ministry have been sharply divergent. His preaching and healings leave onlookers "spellbound", "amazed" and "awestruck." His notoriety spreads like wildfire, attracting growing crowds wherever he goes. Even when he slips away to pray and re-charge, they find him. There's seemingly no escape. The love of spectacle and fascination with celebrity could be drawn from our own age.

Meanwhile, the scribes and Pharisees anxiously sense their sway over the people eroding and, with growing alarm, move quickly from resistance and harping to plotting.

Caught in the middle are those closest to Jesus; the Church traditionally interprets "family" in the broad sense, i.e., meaning his circle of familiars. They can see in both the admirers and detractors a potentially lethal gathering storm. Their aim could simply be to protect him. John the Baptist has been arrested; it's dangerous business being a prophet.

It's an explosive situation which they may be seeking to de-fuse by suggesting folks shouldn't be paying that much attention. If he's truly out of his mind, then everybody just needs to chill.

The part of the story that appeals to this reader are the impulses at play within Jesus. We see the press to proclaim the Kingdom and a recurring hunger for solitude and reflection. Like the twin movements of inhalation and exhalation they bring his ministry to life.

We struggle with the same urges. The balance can be hard to strike, and sometimes recalibration is needed. But the tension shouldn't surprise or trouble us: Christ felt it, too.

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