

## "MY NAME IS MOB"

### INTRODUCTION

One morning back in March I was trying to catch the subway down here at 86th Street. Late for a meeting downtown, I rushed down the stairs and across the platform, heard the screech of the Express on the lower level, raced down another set of stairs, got in the middle of the milling crowd, pushed and shoved my way through the doors before they closed, crammed into a bit of space near the door, and looked at that mob - pushing, poking, jamming, shoving - a kind of jungle. The train began to pull out. There was a sudden lurch and all of a sudden as I looked out the window of the door, I saw myself - my own face, there in the dark of the tunnel, reflected back at me, eyes staring. Uncomfortable, silent, meeting of myself in the dark.

That subway encounter of myself came to mind as I've been thinking about the story of the demoniac, the madman, if you will, in the Gospel account. In the presence of Jesus, he suddenly came to himself. Jesus saw him and asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, "My name is Mob; for there are so many of us in me". This man saw himself in the eyes of Jesus, and like a blurred slide being brought into focus, his image suddenly popped up clearly before Him. There it was - quiet, together, unified.

I've been thinking about that question for myself. "What is your name?" "My name is Mob; for there are so many of us in me" - such chaotic, raw, unharnessed vitality. What is your name? Is there a mob there in you, too? There are two questions that come back every now and then to plague me in connection with this theme. Let's explore them together.

### CREATIVE RATHER THAN DESTRUCTIVE

The first one is how can my power of being be creative rather than destructive? There is a mob in you and in me as in this Gospel story and the mob is violent - pregnant with surges of power that can explode anytime in chaotic destructiveness, or can turn into imagination, creativity and love. The mob in you and in me will always be poised with potential for grandeur and misery.

When did you first begin to realize the destructive powers of your being? Can you remember? When did you last experience them? Remember? I think we've all had those moments when we have been in touch with our destructive potentiality... when the mob in us has broken loose. It may happen on the job with the pressures we've been feeling from the boss or a colleague. Or maybe at home. It's so often the tiny little things that push us over the edge. Over the years it has been building, or over the days of the week, and then suddenly it gets to you. Maybe it's the way one of the children sits at the supper table, or the way a child speaks back, or the way your spouse coughs, or that certain gesture or glance that just drives you batty. The anger suddenly pours out in language and behavior that you just don't believe. And the pretty, polished surface of the relationship is cracked into pieces. Maybe we shouldn't really be surprised when all the hell in us breaks out at home because that is partly what home is for - home and church.

One time the mother of a teen-aged daughter, when her daughter had said and done some very mean things, said to her, "How hostile and mean you are. Every word that comes out of your mouth is poisonous. How do they stand you at school?" To which her daughter replied, "Mother, you don't know me. I am a different person at school. All day long I have to hold in my feelings, but at home I can let out all my frustrations".

Home is meant to be a place where our destructive energies may be exploded in the hope that the covenant and commitment are strong enough to sustain whatever chaos and cruelty come out. The Church is meant to be a place where all of our madmen and madwomen with all of their destructive potential can let it hang out in the hope that there is the strength and grace among us sufficient to heal, to quell any violence, to help us put it all back together.

We all need people who are able to receive all of you and me, and especially that part of us we are afraid won't be accepted. All of us need people who understand, who are there, available, around, who are ready with arms, hearts, hope and stability to help us get it together again.

I'm inclined to insert a cautionary word here. I think we can deify the expression of anger. We're living in a time, culturally, when anger is in; restraint and courtesy are out. We need to remember that expression of anger is not always appropriate or creative. In an article some time ago in Time magazine entitled, "Look Back on Anger", the author, Melvin Maddocks, wrote:

"Anger is the emotion we tend to feel when in doubt about what else we feel. Anger.....today is becoming one of our most praised values. In raising anger to an emotional ideal, we have gravely misgauged the limited utility of adrenalin's quick flashes. In art, anger is regularly mistaken for sincerity, if not inspiration.....anger of any kind has also become the accepted proof of moral conviction. It is the way we act out of certainty when we do not really feel it.....even love, itself, can become a junior partner.

What fierce, cannibalistic love scenes we stage in our films and even in private lives! Such "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" -ishness.....such ripping and tearing....such snarling, savage, winner-takes-all grappling!

In The Intimate Enemy, Dr. George R. Bach, a clinical psychologist, turns anger into an art, or possibly a science.... "anger" Dr. Bach concludes, "cannot be dishonest". Upon Bach's misapprehension, America's newest industry, group therapy founders....venting hostility is so simplistically scripted as the "moment of truth" that a whole cult of anger fakers has developed, not unlike the faith-fakers who also deceived themselves into salvation at other and earlier camp meetings. Anger ought to be an alarm system that warns us of our deepest concerns. But left to itself, it can become an indiscriminating rant, equalizing the serious and the trivial, the horrors of Biafra and the poor quality of frozen dinners.....we can refuse to glamorize it when it is self-indulgence, the sounds of baby shoes stamping".

I have nothing against encounter groups, and would affirm the idea of letting it all hang out. But there is always the question, I feel, of what is appropriate. Sometimes when we let all of our anger out, it may provide us with momentary relief, but it may at the same time end up destroying someone else. Sometimes one should hold his anger in for the sake of another.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME

What is your name? Is the mob in you still bottled up, or locked away somewhere with the key thrown away? It

does seem safer that way...certainly more orderly.....and you don't get into as much trouble and not as much risk.....even if half of you never sees the light of day....ever if you live on four cylinders and never discover that you are an eight cylinder person.

I remember an occasion when I lost control of my feelings....the first thing that erupted and poured forth was resentment. Resentment toward God, my parents, the Church....binding me into feelings of excessive responsibility. But those resentment feelings were followed soon after by appreciation feelings - appreciation for God, for my parents, for the Church, for my lot in life. And I think I realized in those moments that literally in my own body the creative and the destructive powers of being flow from the same depth. I know that I don't want to stifle or muffle or smother my vitality. I want it to flow out in creative, responsible, loving ways in the confidence that the deepest power in me is not dark, but light - healthy and good. That I can trust my own depths and learn to let "me" out with all of the attendant risks and mistakes, growing into the experience of my full being, including that bit of madness that is there in my own nature.

I believe everybody has a little madness in them. We can celebrate our madness. Sam Keen, in a book called, To a Dancing God, writes:

"God, but I want madness!

I want to tremble,  
to be shaken,  
to yield to pulsation,  
to surrender to the rhythm of music and sea,  
to the seasons of ebb and flow,  
to the tidal surge of love.

I am tired of being hard....tight....controlled,  
tensed against the invasion of novelty,  
armed against tenderness,  
afraid of softness.

I am tired of directing my world...making...doing...shaping.

Tension is ecstasy in chains.  
The muscles are tightened to prevent trembling.  
Nerves strain to prevent trust, hope, relaxation.

Surrendering. Giving into the involuntary is:  
madness (idiots tremble)  
ecstasy (being out of my skin, what am I?)  
bliss (love is coming together and parting)  
grace (dancing with the whole spirit)

God, give me madness  
that does not destroy  
wisdom,  
responsibility,  
and love."

This is a prayer that I can pray with my whole heart and perhaps you can, too. God is in your madness and mine. He is in whatever you are afraid of - seeking always to make it creative, joyous, delightful, exuberant, wise, tender.

I believe it is safe to let your destructive feelings begin to flow out in the presence of the spirit of Jesus, who can take you and me and deal with us. I believe our madness can be healed and exalted, and that the powers of our being--our passions - can be made tender and constructive.

GETTING MYSELF TOGETHER

The second question I wish to explore is how can I... who am in pieces and fragments...get myself together. Maybe it's on the job that a man or a woman feels torn to pieces, crammed into a pigeonhole, a cog in someone else's machine. Someone has penned these lines:

"The fellows up in Personnel - they have a set of cards on me;  
Sprinkled perforations tell them my individuality....  
And what am I? I am a chart on the cards of IBM.  
The secret places of the heart have little secrecy for them.  
It matters not how much I prate....  
They punch with punishment the scroll;  
The files are masters of my fate,  
They are captains of my soul."

Maybe it's the role fragmentation that bugs you...having to be mother, wife, daughter, lover, friend, church member, citizen, worker, person. However, in terms of my own life, I find the change of role through the day and week to be a relief and a complementary enrichment. For myself, the split is deeper than that of one of roles....those many "me's" inside competing for attention and allegiance.

Remember the medieval torturing method called quartering? It's not the most pleasant thing to think about...a man's arms and legs were tied to four different horses and then when the word was given, the horses galloped off in four different directions, and the person was literally quartered...torn into pieces. At times that's the way I feel and perhaps you do, too...the four me's in us.... I want, I ought, I need, I love - going in four different directions, or two in one direction and two in another.

Once when I was in college, I came down from the green hills of Vermont with a roommate to visit New York City. I remember going to a place on East 52nd Street where that great black blues singer, Billie Holliday was singing. One of the songs she sang was "All of me....take all of me". She had enormous charisma, and great ability to give herself in her singing. This week I remembered that phrase with envy and with wonder - "all of me". When is "all of me". When am I all together in one piece? Who can put the pieces of this Humpty Dumpty back together again? Not all the king's horses, nor all the king's men, but maybe...maybe Jesus could do it if we were able to stop running long enough and be quiet before Him.

Sam Keen writes a little eassay for Zorba the Greek. He says,

"I long to release the gypsy in me who would roam the earth, tasting, sampling, traveling light. There are so many lives I want to live....so many styles I want to inhabit. In me sleeps Zorba's concern to allow no longly woman to remain comfortless (Here am I Lord, send me). Camus's passion to lessen the sufferings of the innocent...Heminway's drive to live and write with lucidity, and the unheroic desire to see each day end with tranquility, and a shared cup of tea. I am so many, yet I may be only one. I mourn for all the selves I kill when I decide to be a single person.

Decision is cutting off....I travel one path only by neglecting

many.....so I turn my back on small villages I will never see, strange flesh I will not touch, ills I will not cure, and I choose to be in the world as a husband, a father, an explorer of ideas and styles of life. Perhaps Zorba will not leave me altogether. I would not like to live without dancing, without unknown roads to explore.

Nor would I. Nor would you. Some of the me's in us may have to die before we can really live. How is it with you and your many you's, and your longing to be a single person. A man has written:

"I believe that everything wants a living place...its home, if you will, where it becomes what its essence is at a certain time and in a certain place. For example, a man who rests his case for life upon a sounding place, a spot on which his life can stand and from which he can say, 'Here the trembling stops'"

Where does the trembling stop for you? And with whom? Treasure those moments - rare perhaps - moments of peace, of wonder, of joy, of communion. Moments... times....places....where for you that trembling stops. Moments when the mob in you becomes a community...when it's all together....in hammony..quiet...serene... like maybe now.

PRAYER Let us be still and remember Jesus as He was then - powerful to heal, to speak, to save. Think of Him as He is now, powerful as the Spirit of God among us, to lift us up out of low place, to bring the scattered forces of our lives together in a whole....draw us to Him that our power may more and more be tamed by the power of His love and His trust in Thee. Amen