

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (2021)

by Fr Nick Mezacapa

What a story. Jesus, there, calling out the demon. I don't know about you, but I've got some children and grandchildren, to all of whom I've read a great children's story that happens to associate with this episode in the life of Jesus there in Capernaum. It's the story called "Three Billy Goats Gruff". Perhaps you know it. It's about three billy goats who crossed a bridge to get over the other side of the river because the grass is better over there. They went across the bridge, and of course, under the bridge lives the ugly troll. Well, the three billy goats are the little billy goat, the middle-sized billy goat, and the great big billy goat. The little billy goat goes first. He crosses the bridge and about halfway across, the troll jumps up and says, "I'm going to eat you up!" And the little billy goat says, "Oh please don't eat me. My brother's coming, and he's bigger!" And the troll says, "All right, go!" and he goes back under the bridge. And the little billy goat goes across. The middle-sized billy goat, the second billy goat, goes to cross the bridge, and the troll jumps up when he's halfway across and says, "Aaah! I'm going to eat you up!" And the middle billy goat says, "Well, you could eat me, but... have you ever been to the country buffet? My brother's coming and he's really big. He's a *meal*." And the troll says, "All right, go!" and he goes back under the bridge. And the great big billy goat gruff comes stomping across the bridge and halfway, the troll jumps up from under the bridge and says, "I've been waiting all day! I'm going to eat you up!" And here's the punchline... The

great big billy goat says, “Okay. Come and get it.” And the troll says, “Of course!” And the big billy goat puts his horns down and rams the troll off the bridge, down into the river,... down he goes. And the moral of the story is, that ultimately, in life, you’ve gotta face your ugly troll.

We all have them somewhere. The most fundamental rule at any gathering of Alcoholics Anonymous, is that each member, when given a chance to speak, begins with the most basic admission. They say, “Hello everyone. I am [their name], and I am an alcoholic.” No more excuses. No more pretending. The recovery process has to begin with that admission: “I am an alcoholic.” Publicly, facing their ugly troll. No more hiding. No healing, no progress can begin to be authentic, until the person faces the reality, that demon, if you would... eye-to-eye, and make this painful, elusive, heretofore rationalized admission, “I am an alcoholic.”

And I would propose to you today that the truth and vitality of this process is that the center of our healing. We need to face and acknowledge our “demons” too. Our unresolved issues, regrets, mistakes, bad choices,... hurt that we have caused. Those “demons” need to be faced and admitted to too, in the effort to salvage our own healing.

In the gospel story today, Jesus sets this process in place. He faces the “demon” in the man and says, “Come out of him!” Not a gentle, softened invitation. “Come out of him!” He draws out the spiritual demon, face-to-face, eye-to-eye. Fast-forwarding the healing. That's where we have to start too.

Facing that ugly troll with humility, because it's where Jesus wants to come into our experience, aiming us to self liberation. Face the demons. Face them. Face whatever that ugly troll is for you. Face yourself, and give healing a chance, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.