

Conflicting beliefs

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In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus heals many sick people and casts out many demons. I've been thinking about healing a lot lately.

My mom has fairly severe arthritis in her hands, and I can feel it beginning in mine. My index finger won't bend all the way anymore. I know some of the things I can do to make this better—eat better and eat the right things, exercise more to keep my blood flowing and the energy circulating more freely through my body. But [as the Apostle Paul reminds us](#), it's terribly hard to do the right thing.

My poor acupuncturist. He tells me what kinds of tea to drink and what kinds of food to avoid to help myself heal faster. But some days—okay, maybe a lot of days—I just can't do the right thing. The cookies are so appealing! The cheesy lasagna is so seductive! And the gym seems so far away. Where does the compulsion come from? Why the lack of will around exercise?

I know that part of my problem is rooted in what I believe and what I don't believe. I believe firmly, based on real and consistent experience, that if I eat wheat I will feel nauseous for a day or two. So I avoid wheat. (I've learned how to make gluten-free cookies and lasagna.) But I don't really believe, not really in my heart, that sitting at my desk for too many hours a day will make me sick. Although, when I think rationally, I do know this to be true. This sedentary lifestyle is damaging my health.

So maybe I do believe it. Why don't I make a change? Maybe because other pressures, other beliefs, are stronger. A part of me believes that if I don't force myself to sit at my desk and achieve what I can achieve there, I will not be able to

make a living—that I will fail to do what I need to do, or what I’m expected to do. Pushing, pushing, pushing to do more, I’m trying to overcome the feeling that I am not enough.

And when I think about this, I recognize some of the demons who commandeer my mind and keep me captive to my fear. Lethargy kicks in to keep me docile and surrendered. The demons get each of us in different ways. I’m thinking of C. S. Lewis’s classic book *The Screwtape Letters*, in which a demon uncle guides his demon nephew on how to bring the humans over to the dark side.

Resisting the whispered temptations that can bring us down requires recognizing them, first and foremost, so we stop pretending they’re not nagging us. Once we give them names, we have a better chance of undermining their work in us. I guess I should be speaking in the first person here. Awareness and acceptance have been very empowering in my own process of healing. It’s the denial, the looking the other way, that creates deeper and deeper problems.

My acupuncturist believes that we can prevent my arthritis from getting worse. I do believe that too. I just know I need to cooperate with my own intentions more.