



SUNDAY OF THE HEALING OF THE POSSESSED MAN

Luke 8:26-39

"And when Jesus was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him out of the city a certain man, which had devils a long time, and wore no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs."

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning's Gospel narrative recounts the Lord's meeting with the man possessed by demons, who lived in tombs and terrorized the people in the fields and on the roads, working destruction and wickedness. This, of course, we would recognize as a sign of mental illness, of insanity, in our secular world today, but it is also an indication of demonic activity. This is not to say that all mental illness has a demonic origin, any more than all physical illness is the result of our sins. But it is to remind us that under certain conditions of particularly grave sinfulness or even actual conscious openness to the occult, the result can indeed be mental illness or bodily sickness. You see, Christ always brings healing and wholeness, serenity and peace; the demons always bring unhappiness, disturbance, and destruction. This is why, in the old Orthodox countries, when someone exhibits signs of mental disturbance they are first brought to the priest and exposed to the relics of saints, wonderworking icons, confession and Holy Communion. If they are unable to withstand the presence of such grace, then we can know that there is sure demonic activity present, and in that case the Church knows what the proper spiritual medicine is. If, on the other hand, this person can peacefully receive this grace, then we know that this illness is not of demonic origin, and he can seek recourse with professional doctors and psychiatrists.

But in our Western culture today, where Orthodoxy struggles to survive, and barely succeeds in all but the outer forms, what is our usual first reaction when someone shows signs of mental illness? We urge them to go to a psychiatrist, a psychologist, take medicines, etc. Whereas, instead, we should *first* bring such individuals to the priest, who will use the powerful prayers of the Church as well as anointing with holy oil, etc., to bring healing and peace to the troubled individual. We are failing to use the supernatural tools that have been given to us by the Lord Himself.

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



It's also interesting that the man in this Gospel lived in tombs—something characteristic, by the way, of people who were possessed in those times, for it happened that very often tombs were the habitation of fallen angels—so naturally people who were possessed were drawn to these places. This is one of the reasons why some of the Desert Fathers of Egypt sought out the tombs of the ancient Egyptians to live in, because they wish to confront, directly, and boldly, with the strength of Christ Himself, the demons that lived there. Archaeologists and those with a completely secular mind-set today bemoan the fact that those desert hermits painted crosses on the frescoes of many of those tombs, considering that these Christians were defacing priceless historical artifacts, not understanding that these holy monks and nuns knew and experienced fully the power of the Cross to banish the presence of demons.

It's also extremely important for us to know that when the disobedient angels of heaven fell from the presence of God, they fell to the earth, and so this particular planet in space, and the atmosphere around it, is the Kingdom of the Evil One, as Scripture itself tells us. And because of man's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, and *our own consciously chosen sins*, these fallen angels here on earth are free to roam around us and constantly tempt us; they are, as it were, let loose in our very midst, and very holy elders and eldresses and saints, who have been given spiritual vision, can actually see them around us, interacting with us, attempting to lead us astray. I mention this not in order to frighten anyone, but to sober everyone up because so many of us live in a casual and very worldly mind-set that takes no account whatever of the very real unseen warfare that is going on around us. Yet, we have only to look at what is going on in the world today, between individuals and between nations and cultures, to see how very successful these fallen angels are in our very midst, how they have now brought mankind to the very edge of complete disaster, a Third World War, complete global economic collapse, famine and plague, and savage persecution of Christianity. *This*, my brothers and sisters, is the fruit of our sinful cooperation with the fallen angels.

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You don't believe me? You think I am exaggerating? Well then, bestir yourself from TV and football games long enough to read Scripture and see what the Lord tells us there. Bother to read spiritual books, especially the lives and writings of the saints and holy elders of our own recent times, who have been crying out in the wilderness seeking to awaken mankind, like John the Baptist two thousand years ago, who boldly cried out, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

In this morning's account we see that the demons in this particular man, when they saw the Lord approaching, cried out, "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Here we can see that even devils are compelled to recognize Christ as God. When we look around us at the world today, and we see so very many who no longer recognize Christ, we realize, with sinking hearts for them, that they have sunk even lower than the demons!

St. Nicolai Velimirovitch tells us that "in Christ's presence they [these devils] were not only abjectly terrified but were, in their terror, humbled—like every tyrant before its judge—for they began to beg the Lord" not to torment them. You see, the demons knew that at the end of the world their final fate would be eternal hell fire, and they thought that the coming of Christ into the world was the beginning of that final fate, as indeed, in a certain sense, it was and is.

"The whole of this incident, from beginning to end, has an even deeper, inner meaning....as a teaching, warning and means of arousing all [of us] who feel themselves in their bodies as if in a tomb; who perceive the working of demonic power in the passions that press on them like iron shackles and chains, dragging them down to the pit of destruction." (St. Nicolai)

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Yet the good news is that Christ comes to us, just as He came to this man possessed by demons, and He can conquer the demons that surround and invade and oppress us, just as He cast them out of that madman! His power to do so is no less today than it was then!

But what is necessary for that to happen? Wishful thinking? Sincere hopefulness? More good resolutions? Or is there something that we ourselves must *do*? You see, it is not enough to know the eternal, life-giving and revealed truths of our Holy Orthodox Faith. That's just the beginning—and tragically, many who consider themselves Orthodox do not even know this much! Nor is it enough to recite the Creed in each Divine Liturgy. Rather, *we must live this Faith and this Creed every day of our lives!* We must become the living disciples of the Lord! Not to do so is to be guilty of the worst hypocrisy, for we, having been given the fullness of the Truth and having professed it with our lips, have instead turned away from it by the very manner of lives and sins; we have become like the whitewashed tombs that the Lord cursed in Scripture. And remember, these tombs are the dwellings of fallen angels, of the darkest supernatural vipers imaginable—worse than anything any horror movie Hollywood could create. For these demons have only the most profound loathing for us, because we were created in the image of God and have the possibility of repentance and salvation, which they do not.

Therefore, why do we not strive to behave, act, and actually *live* as “images of God”? Why do we, instead, act as though we are made in the image of the devil—an image that we see now all around us in our culture, on our TV screens, in films and books and magazines, on our computer screens, and in world news? (And this, by the way, is why it's so important for us to surround ourselves with icons—images of goodness, truth, and beauty, in order to counteract the images of the Beast which are increasingly everywhere.)

Think upon this, this morning. And let us cry out, with our whole hearts, and from the very bottom of our hearts, from the very core of our being: O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity, *have mercy on us sinners, heal us and save us!*”

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.