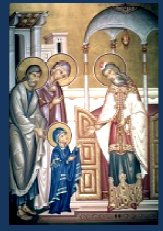


August 21,  
2011

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
*Entrance of the Theotokos Skete*



## HEALING OF THE DEMON POSSESSED BOY

### ... RECTIFYING INVISIBLE DEMONS

Gospel: Matthew 17:14-23: *"And when many were come to the multitude..."*

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

This morning's Gospel is very interesting because it tells us about the man who asks the Lord to heal his son, who is a "lunatic"—in other words, mentally ill. The Lord has of course already been constantly healing people everywhere He goes of all sorts of maladies, diseases, illnesses and afflictions, all throughout His ministry—much more than is even recorded in the New Testament—but for some reason, the Lord's response to this particular father's request concerning his son is different from usual. Christ suddenly says, rather imperiously, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" And then He heals the boy who, it turns out, was possessed by a devil (mental illness can sometimes be induced by demonic activity, you see).

The Savior appears to be impatient, but actually, He's only trying to impress upon His followers that His visible time in the flesh on this earth is running out, and there is still so much to teach them, so much for them to learn, and they must struggle to pay more attention and focus on what He is teaching them. The disciples then took Him aside and asked why they had not been able to cast out this particular demon, and the Lord said, "Because of your *unbelief*; for verily I say unto you: if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain: 'Remove hence to yonder place', and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit, this kind [of demon] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Here He clearly advances the level of their understanding.

### OF ALL THE JEWELS—DIAMONDS, EVEN

... that are in this reading--I have selected just the following one to hold up for our admiration. What an interesting Gospel account! So rich that we can only begin to sketch its main implications in one homily.

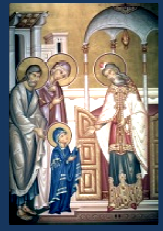
Even before Judeo-Christianity all primitive religions believed that there is a spiritual and invisible world as well as the material and temporal world we live in. But before God began to reveal Himself to the Jews, and then more completely through Christ to His Church, many people were led astray and decided that evil spirits were more powerful than good spirits. This is perhaps easy to understand, from a purely fallen human standpoint, when we look at the world around us and the depraved behavior of people.

***Without revelation we can't really see this correctly, however.***

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You see, some pagans--even still today--built temples to these evil spirits, deifying them. The ancient Egyptians of course come to mind, but so also modern day Hindus, among others. In their "theology" they came to believe that they must constantly appease these wicked "gods" and, as St. Nicolai Velimirovich observes, in their religions "this world seemed to be a racecourse, where men and evil spirits competed with one another. Evil spirits tormented men more and more, and blinded them, only in order to erase from their minds any idea of a good God and of the great, God-given power of the good spirits."

## **BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THIS IS STILL GOING ON AROUND US TODAY.**

Those among our contemporaries who dabble in the occult—even sometimes Orthodox Christians!—are seeking power from these evil spirits, rather than seeking refuge in our Good God, Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the All-Blessed and Eternally Holy Trinity. And, among otherwise right-believing Christians, there is sometimes a kind of superstitious idea that our True God is an angry God who must be appeased, who is waiting to trap us and catch us enjoying ourselves. This, however, reflects a pagan outlook, *not* a Christian one.

When the Savior came into this world two thousand years ago almost everyone on earth believed in and served exclusively evil spirits whom they had deified and sought to appease. This is why Christ called the Leader of these spirits, Satan, "the Prince of this world." The Lord did not seek to utterly annihilate this world of demons, but, rather, revealed and confirmed the existence of the invisible spiritual world as it is *in reality*, and not as it "appears" to those outside Revelation. He made it quite clear that there are good spirits, and they are angels, and these angels are immensely more powerful than evil spirits, which are the fallen angels. This is why we do not serve or appease or even seek to have even the slightest contact with the fallen spirits. We not only don't need to, but we are warned that it is exceedingly dangerous to do so. This is why we make abundant use of Holy Water, incense, candles, icons, etc., especially in our homes, for these things are fearsome to demons and drive them out.

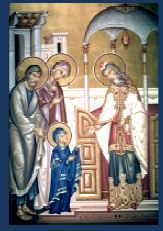
## **SO, HOW DO WE OPEN OURSELVES TO THE WORLD OF INVISIBLE DEMONS?**

It happens easily, and it happens all the time. Let me just list a few of the ways in which we can, perhaps even without fully realizing it, open a door just a crack, just enough for one of these imps to slip through and begin influencing us in very negative ways. Often it starts in childhood and even in families where traditional Orthodox spirituality and piety either don't exist or are compromised for one reason or another because we don't pass on these teachings to our children. There are obvious things, like playing "innocently" with ouija boards. But then there are those who go to mediums (believe it or not, there are even some supposedly Orthodox women who claim to *be* "mediums"—a contradiction in terms, of course). Reading

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tea leaves, by the way—something very popular among some old world Orthodox—is another form of mediumism. Consulting fortune tellers, tarot card readers, etc. These are all more of the same thing. All of this is risky, at best, and certainly sinful, and at worst it invites an evil spirit into our homes, our lives, our very minds.

But in addition to these things, which are actually pretty obvious, I have to mention some less obvious ways in which the portals to the invisible world of fallen spirits is opened: one of these is through an abuse of alcohol and drugs. Countless souls have already been harmed and even lost in this way. It's no accident that our staunch forebears used to refer to "demon rum". To this I must also add an abuse of sex, which includes pornography and even so-called "soft" porn. We seem to no longer teach from the pulpit or the amvon that sexual behavior of any kind is blessed only between a man and a woman in marriage. There is a demon of lust, and those who violate God's law with regard to sex open the door to this particularly vile demon.

**THE SCRIPTURES TELL US THAT IN JUST ONE SINGLE CRAZY MAN WHO WAS HEALED BY THE LORD THERE WAS A WHOLE "LEGION"—THAT IS, SEVERAL THOUSAND EVIL SPIRITS.**

Evil spirits are numerous—although not as many as the good angels, by any means. According to St. Dionysios the Areopagite, only one third of the angels fell from heaven into hell; so that means that there are *far* more good angels than fallen. But, still, these evil angels are many.

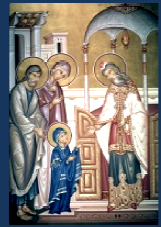
**THIS IS THE TIME OF THE GREAT TESTING, THE GREAT SIFTING OF SOULS, AND ACCORDING TO MANY RECENT SAINTS AND ELDERS THAT THAT TIME IS NOW**

According to Orthodox teaching and many holy elders, as well as Scripture, the "time of the end" is when more demons will be released from hell to torment human beings than before. What Scripture calls "the power that restrains" the Evil One will be removed from the earth in preparation for the Last Times, the coming of the antichrist, and the return of the Lord. It is already here. It is upon us. And this explains why, in less than a century—really beginning with World War I--we have seen an unbelievably savage attack of human beings upon other humans, in war, in genocide, in holocausts and in immorality. The demon inspired atheists of the 20<sup>th</sup> (and now, the 21<sup>st</sup>) century have caused more human suffering and death than all the rest of history put together! (We don't study history any more—and it isn't taught honestly in our schools, either--so most people don't see this.) During the same time in which we have achieved amazing technological and medical advances and seeming miracles, the influence of the demonic world has become greater, stronger, and more powerful than has ever been seen before in history. We should make careful and prudent note of this.

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**THIS TELLS US THAT OUR GREATEST PROTECTOR AND SECURITY DURING THIS MOST DIFFICULT TIME IN HUMAN HISTORY IS *STILL*, AND ALWAYS WILL BE, CHRIST.**

But we must not forget that no one fears the Lord Jesus Christ and His All-Pure Mother, the Theotokos, more than the fallen angels. This is why, on more than one occasion when the Lord approached those who were demon-possessed, these spirits trembled and cried out: "Art Thou come hither to torment us?" (Matt. 8:29) And this is why, in some monasteries in Greece, for instance, when those who are possessed are brought to the priest-monks for exorcism, the demons are cast out by the monastics surrounding the possessed person and chanting The Jesus Prayer. The demons cannot resist this holy Name and depart, leaving the possessed person clean and undefiled.

**And THIS, brother and sisters, is why we should all do our utmost to acquire a good and stable practice of The Jesus Prayer in our own lives!**

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

#### ADDITIONAL LINKS:

"Mysteries of the Jesus Prayer" a new documentary feature film from SnagFilms (Comcast & Fios On-Demand) and HarperOne book, focuses on the mysteries behind the prayer that is thought to have first been practiced by the Apostles some 2,000 years ago. The prayer is still chanted by monks and nuns in far away caves and monasteries but is mostly unknown to the rest of the western world. Many say that with this prayer, it is possible to communicate directly with God.

Silence at St. Catherine's Monastery - Father Makarios - Father Teofil - Abbess Josephina - MORE

<http://www.mysteriesofthejesusprayer.com>

The Jesus Prayer - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

<http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7104>