



72nd Year

July 28, 2024

Pamphlet #30 (3713)

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL (Matthew 8:28-34, 9:1)

The demon-possessed Gergesenes

At that time, when Jesus came to the country of the Gergesenes, two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one would pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, and what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood. And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

THE DEVIL'S DESTRUCTIVE WORK

The Gospel reading of the 5th Sunday of Matthew describes to us the meeting of Christ with the two demon-possessed people in the land of the Gergesenes. This meeting of Christ with the two demon-possessed people is a revelation of the real person and work of the devil, and on the other hand, of the power of Christ.

Does the devil exist?

According to the biblical-patristic tradition, the devil is not a personification of the passions, but a person who was created by God as an angel; and when he lost communion with Him, he became a dark spirit, a devil. The devil, as a person, has free will, i.e. freedom, which God neither violates nor abolishes.

God's omnipotence, according to His will, does not abolish the freedom of rational beings. Thus, He allows the devil to do evil, because he is a person. However, He limits his destructive work with love and philanthropy. When man repents, He forgives him, and in this way, He limits the kingdom of the devil, but the final abolition of the devil's dominion will take place at the Second Coming.

The work of the devil

The work of the devil is destructive. He excessively hates man and all creation. He is possessed by an excessive deadly misanthropy. Satan managed to subjugate man to passions and sin through deceit and slyness. The reason that led him to this act was envy. The devil envied Adam because he saw him residing in the place of complete and irrevocable enjoyment, Paradise.

This attack and attempt of the devil to lure man into passions is done gradually. St. Gregory Palamas says that Satan does not directly dictate sin and life separate from the Church, but "gradually he cunningly steals" by whispering to man the thought that he can remain in virtue and know from himself, what should he do, without even going to church and without obeying the pastors and teachers of the Church. And when he succeeds in removing him from the worship life of the Church, he removes him from the Grace of God, having previously handed him over to the slavery of the passions.

Why does God allow the devil to fight us?

Saint Maximus the Confessor mentions five reasons: The first is for us to distinguish between virtue and vice, by conducting this struggle. The second, so that through the struggle, we can keep the virtue certain and unchangeable. The third is for us to not be proud, as we progress in virtue, but to consider that it is a gift from God. The fourth is for us to completely hate evil, and the fifth is for us to not forget our own weakness and God's power when we reach to dispassion.

The emptying of our life

The bad thing today is that our entire culture ignores this reality. That is why we can say with certainty that we leave man unredeemed, powerless and weak. On the other hand, the emptying of the ecclesiastical Mysteries is the most heart-breaking phenomenon of our ecclesiastical life. Because, while the Mysteries were given to the Church for the salvation of man, to exorcise, fight, and defeat Satan, people turn them into opportunities for individual vanity and social vainglory, into mere ceremonies and services provided. When Christians gather in the Church, writes Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, to share in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the demonic powers are crushed, and this means that God's love keeps man away from every demonic influence. "Wherever Christ is not, there are the demons; and there where the demons are, the correct thoughts are corrupted and perverted."

We have forgotten as Orthodox, that we belong to the Church of Christ, and we enter it not to fulfill a formal duty and to justify ourselves, but to be healed and saved; and thus, to testify through our dogmatic conscience that the Lord of the world and history is Christ. Whoever knows the truth neither fears nor despairs.

† F. A.

The devil is weak

- *Elder, the thought tells me that the devil, especially in our days, has a lot of power.*

- The devil has malice and hatred, not power. God's love is omnipotent. Satan tries to appear omnipotent, but he does not succeed. He looks strong, but he is completely weak. Many of his destructive plans fail before they begin to be realized. Would a really good father ever let some bums beat his kids?

- *Elder, I'm afraid of the demons.*

- What is there to be afraid of? The demons have no power. Christ is omnipotent. Temptation is rotten. Don't you wear a cross? The devil's weapons are weak. Our Christ has armed us with His Cross. Only when we leave the spiritual weapons, then the enemy has power. A small cross was shown by an Orthodox priest to a sorcerer, and it made the demon that he had invoked with his sorcery tremble.

(From the book of the Apostolic Ministry:
Anthology of Counsels of Saint Paisios the Hagiorite)

July 28, 2024: 5TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW

Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon and Parmenas of the Apostles

Tone: 4 – Eothinon: 5 – Epistle: Rom. 10:1-10 – Gospel: Matt. 8:28-9:1

NEXT SUNDAY: August 4, 6th Sunday of Matthew

Epistle: Romans 12:6-14 – Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8

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VOICE OF THE LORD, a weekly pamphlet of Orthodox faith and life of the "Apostolic Ministry of the Church of Greece". Iasiou 1, 115 21 Athens. Publisher – Director: Metropolitan of Phanariou, Agathangelos. Editorial office, tel. 210.7272.331. Processing, tel. 210.7272.388. Through the holy churches, it is distributed free of charge. From the Printing Office of the Apostolic Ministry.

The *VOICE OF THE LORD* worldwide via the Internet:

www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr
