

ON PROTECTION FROM DARK POWERS
By Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev)
5th Sunday After Pentecost
July 4, 1999. Moscow, Church of the Holy Great-martyr Catherine

In the Gospel reading that we just heard (Matt. 8:28-9:1) the Lord casts out demons from two men who had been possessed by them for a long time. There are many similar stories such as this one in the Gospel. And every time we read them we ask: "How is this related to me?" Actually, it is directly related to all of us. Just like in the time of Jesus Christ, so today as well, people are assaulted by the demons. Much has changed in the course of the existence of mankind. However, for as long as the demons have existed, nothing with them has changed. They are just as insidious and cunning, and they continue to make every effort to impede our salvation.

People have different attitudes towards the demons. Some are firmly convinced that they do not exist at all. On the other hand, there are others who are terrified by them, and everywhere they look they think that they see the evil eye, bewitchment and the such. We must remember that we are Orthodox Christians, and if we go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, if we make the sign of the cross, if we live according to the Gospel and keep the commandments of God, then nothing concerning this is terrifying and nothing that is demonic can touch us, because we are firmly protected by the shield of faith and the shield of Christ, which protects us from being struck by the arrows which are hurled at us by the demons.

When are demons able to influence people? When a person himself allows them to enter into his soul. This happens every time we knowingly resist fulfilling the will of God. This happens to people after they have committed sins and done things which are not permitted for Christians. There are many ways for the demons to be able to penetrate a person. A person allows entrance into his soul to demons when he consorts with sorcerers, witches, psychics, fortune tellers and tarot card readers, when he participates in anything connected with trying to influence this world with other-worldly powers. In this case he becomes unprotected.

A person allows entrance to evil powers if he abuses the use of alcohol or uses narcotics. Prolonged exposure to large doses of alcohol, not to mention drugs, can lead to dire consequences, including the fact that demons will take over a person.

Entrance to demons is permitted through fornication and other sins which are connected with marital infidelity, adultery — the breaking of the seventh commandment. People who have experienced something like this know how terrible it is to lose their chastity and purity and what tremendous efforts they must then make to restore their relationship with God.

It is not without reason that the Church has a very strict attitude concerning sins connected with the seventh commandment, as well as towards the other sins which I have enumerated. For within every person a struggle is waged between good and evil, between God and the devil. It is a struggle for salvation and the spiritual survival of each of us. If we are not victorious in this struggle, then the same thing can occur with us that occurred with the demoniacs about whom we read today. And then we would become dependent upon dark and evil powers and it would be very difficult to be able to struggle with them. Therefore, it behooves us to do our very best and our fervent utmost to make every effort to preserve our purity, and to not permit those sins by which demons can gain entrance into our souls. Let us never depart from the Church, not even for a short time. Let us remember that on our own we can hardly cope with those temptations that come to us from the demons. But if God is with us, then who is against us? If we are with God, then there is no power — evil, dark or demonic — who can hurt us.

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen