

SERMON - JESUS HEALS THE DEMONIAK AND CASTS THE DEMONS INTO A HERD OF SWINE: Luke 8:26-39, Given Sunday, October 29, 2017

Violence and hatred have no control over us unless we allow it. Evil has no power over us unless we choose evil. When a human being is oppressed and treated unjustly, when human dignity and respect is taken away from you by a person, a government, an institution, people of a particular race, religion or ethnic culture, then it is very understandable to be inclined to choose violence and to return hatred with hatred. The Puritans who left England came to the New World seeking religious freedom, yet they themselves took that freedom away from others once they settled into power in a new land. White men in the South created Jim Crow laws and practiced racial discrimination and oppression. The temptation to choose evil over good can be very strong, and it is not always a simple or easy matter to discern. However, no matter how bad the circumstances may be, ultimately we still make the choice and we *do* have the power to resist evil and to choose good. Even when our emotions run high and the circumstances of life push us in a dark direction, our Lord is with us and He gives us the power, with His help, to make the right choices. There were men who chose the power of love over the power of violence, and who used love and the power of peaceful resistance and non-cooperation to overcome the evil of hate and oppression. They did not preach pacifism. If another government threatened our freedoms, such as in WWII, these same men would rather take up arms and fight than to give in to a foreign power that would enslave us. But in our very own country they overcame discrimination and oppression by peaceful non-violent means.

There is always a demon lurking behind every evil choice and every dark action in life. When we choose evil, then we are inviting that demon into our lives, into our very being. Just as St. Paul says that our bodies should be living temples of the Holy Spirit, through our choices and way of life, our bodies and minds can instead become the dwelling place of demons. We see that with this demoniac whom Jesus heals in today's Gospel. We are not told the circumstances of this man's life. We do not know why he chose evil over good. We do not know how it came to be that not one or two, but that an entire legion of demons came to possess and dwell within this man. But deep down the man wanted to be healed. Deep down in his soul, although we do not see or hear it, he is crying out in torment and agony and asking Jesus to heal him. No matter how dark or powerful the sin, until our last breath, there is always the opportunity to be healed by the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom points out that there is in this Gospel story a worse possession and a worse evil than that exhibited by the demoniac. The demoniac's possession is obvious: he is described as insane and naked, and so violent that chains and bonds couldn't hold him. He was constantly guarded and watched. He was cast out of the city. On the other hand, let's for a moment consider instead the Gadarenes themselves, the people of this land who live in the city. According to common social standards, they are in all appearances normal, articulate and there is no reason to believe that they exhibit any violence. We have no reason to believe that they run around naked. But I tell you that these very same people are more possessed by demons than the demoniac. When Jesus heals the demoniac and casts out the demons; and at their request sends them into a herd of swine, the Gadarenes become afraid. They are afraid because they see in Jesus a power that they have never seen before, a power so great that it can interfere with their very lives and even their livelihood. An entire herd of their swine perishes in a lake. Having suffered this economic loss, they are probably wondering what else Jesus can and may do to affect and change their lives. So they bluntly tell Jesus that they don't want Him there anymore. He is not welcome. They don't want Him in their land and they bluntly and plainly tell the Lord that they want Him to leave. What greater evil, what greater insanity, what greater demonic act can there be than to tell God that we don't want Him in our

lives, that we don't need or want Him and that we reject and even hate Him? Who is possessed here, the demoniac or the Gadarenes? Do we welcome the Lord, or do we consider the Lord and His teachings to be a nuisance? Do we try to conform and live our lives according to the Gospel? Or do we call ourselves Christians with our mouths but in our hearts wish that the Lord would go away? Do we say one thing with our mouths but do something else by our actions? It can be said that the main prayer of Christians is the Lord's prayer. May we say this prayer with faith and heartfelt sincerity. May we say it with love and may we believe that the Words of the Lord and of this prayer are true and right. No matter how many times we may fall, let us repent each time, and Jesus will pick us up, as the Lord says in the Gospel, even unto 70 X 7. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One." Amen.