

## **SERMON ON THE GADARENE DEMONIAK, Luke 8:26-39, Sunday, October 28, 2018**

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? Our Savior conquered the Devil by the power of the Cross. The chains of Satan that fettered mankind were broken, and mankind was liberated from slavery to the tyranny of the Devil forever and for all time. Yet we are weak, yet we succumb to temptation, yet we sin. But Christian, do not despair! St. Peter asked the Lord how many times a man should be forgiven, quoting the Old Testament standard of seven times. Jesus answers that a man should be forgiven not seven times, but seventy times seven. In other words, God always forgives us our mistakes and weaknesses if we turn to Him with genuine remorse and repentance for our sins. Until our last breath we always have the opportunity to repent and to be forgiven for our sins. The most famous example of this is the thief who repented and asked Jesus to remember him just before dying on a cross. And Jesus says to him that this day you will be with me in Paradise. If we genuinely struggle with a sincere heart and do the best that we can, then God will always forgive us and lift us up, "unto seventy times seven." Jesus will say to us too, "this day you will be with Me in Paradise." This is a great comfort and solace to us. It is said that the main prayer of the Christians is the Lord's prayer. This is the prayer that Jesus Himself gave us when he taught us how to pray. Let us pray the Lord's prayer often and with deep faith and sincerity. The Didache, an ancient Christian text, says that all Christians should pray the Lord's prayer at least three times a day. May God forgive us as we forgive others, and may we always cry out to God with firm hope, faith and love that He "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One." Amen.

