

SERMON ON THE GERGESENES - JULY 9, 2017

Jesus and His disciples had just experienced a storm at sea. Jesus is asleep in the boat during the storm, but His disciples, lacking in faith, despaired and woke the Lord, declaring, "Lord save us! We are perishing!" Finally, Jesus calms the storm by His Divine Word, as Lord and Master, and not as a servant. Moses used a rod to calm the sea, or stretched out his hands to God to perform his miracles. Jesus uses no instrument and stretches His hands to no one. He performs the miracle by His word alone, because He Himself is the source of the power and authority to calm the storm, because He is the Son of God. After this event, the Gospel narrative continues with Jesus and His disciples going to the land of the Gergesenes, a Gentile city east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. Jesus is confronted by a new storm, but this time it is not an external storm of wind and rain. It is the storm of the soul, the storm of inner turmoil and darkness, the storm of evil. The worst possible storm that a man can experience, much more frightful and dangerous than the storm at sea. Jesus confronts two men violently possessed by demons. The demons proclaim the Godhead of Jesus, even as everyone else calls Jesus a man. But they are not flattering or worshipping Jesus, but ask him if He, Jesus, the Son of God, has come to torment them before the time. Just the mere presence of Jesus is causing them pain, suffering and torment. How often do we read in the lives of the saints, that when the demons are confronted by holiness or prayer, especially the Jesus prayer, they cry out that they are burning. The demons know that they are evil and have sinned and deserve punishment. They fear that Jesus has caught them in the act of such horrific and lawless crimes by tormenting God's creatures, that Jesus will not wait until the appointed time, but that they will receive their just punishment now. Yet they have the shameful audacity to demand that they be not tormented before the time. The demons beg to be cast into a peaceful herd of swine. Jesus fulfills their request. We now have this spectacular image of a herd of swine, of pigs, all of a sudden becoming violently wild with the dark and ferocious powers that are in the men. It's obviously meant to show how destructive and how many and how countless and how powerful they were and what destructive power they had. They go into the swine, who were probably just peacefully sitting around there, and all of a sudden the swine become totally crazy and wild with those very same demons, and they came rushing down the hill into the abyss and into the lake and they are drowned. Jesus teaches the men who had been possessed and everyone else how awful and ugly and dark the demons and sin are, and what better way than to equate sin with pigs, who personify uncleanness and debauchery. If someone is lecherous we call him a pig. If someone is filthy, we call him a pig. And so on. Secondly, Jesus wants to show His Godhead and His power over the demons and His power to heal the possessed and to deliver us from our sins. The frightful thing is that every time we sin, we are consorting with these very same demons. Like the Elder Ephraim of Arizona says, the demons constantly knock at our door, but they cannot come in unless we open the door and let them in. And once we let them in, and the longer they stay and make themselves comfortable, the harder it will be for us to evict them. If this scene wasn't bad enough, now Jesus is faced with a third storm, blacker and more dangerous and horrific than the storm at sea or the storm of the possessed men. The fine citizens of this city, clothed, clean, upright citizens, in their right mind, they come to Jesus and tell Him to get out. They don't want Him to disturb their little lives and their covetousness. Instead of being honored with the presence of God in their midst, instead of rejoicing that Jesus had cast out the demons, the multitude love and care more about their pocketbooks because they lost money when their swine perished in the sea. And who knows what others sins and demons they consorted with? Deliverance from sin, salvation, eternal life meant nothing to them. They are frightened at the idea, and don't want to hear about it. Get out, they tell Jesus. Go back where you came from. We lost money because of you. Their money is more important to them than anything else. The Lord says, "You cannot serve God and mammon." So here it is in plain sight in a real event in the life of our Savior. The Gergesenes don't need or want Jesus. They want to go on with their little lives just as they always have. For them Jesus is only a

disturbance and an annoyance. Fr. Tom Hopko says, "And how many people there are like that now on the planet Earth, in our own country here of America. They want to live how they want to live, with their TV and their *porneia* and their greed and perhaps even their alcohol and their partying, you know, people say, "Let's go partying tonight." A total debauched life: sexuality, carnality, all kinds of stuff. And they don't want God messing it up. They don't want Jesus coming there and casting out those demons. They *prefer* the demons. They *prefer* the familiar demons." They want to go on living with their pigs. How many times do we hear about crowds that are demon possessed, violent, destructive, wild, out of control, obscene, doing violence and destruction to property and other people? In Mark's Gospel only one man shows gratitude and wants to follow Jesus, and that is the man who had been most possessed. In Mark it says, "However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." The Gergesenes tell Jesus to get out, so He goes back into the boat and leaves their city. How insane is that, to tell Jesus to get out? Fr. Tom says that instead of telling Jesus to get out let us say a hundred times a day, "deliver us from the Evil One," and "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." forgive us for being jealous, covetous, judging others, for lust of power, vanity, pride and all of our sins and temptations. O God, deliver us from every power of the devil. Deliver us from the evil one. Amen.