



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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On Christ Casting Out the Legion of Demons Week of November 11, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

The Gospel lesson we heard on Sunday morning (Luke 8:26-39) was both powerful and perplexing. It was the story of our Lord's exorcism of a man possessed by a legion of demons, a lesson that comes up twice each year - once from Matthew's Gospel and then again as we heard it this past Sunday from Luke's Gospel as well. It is the kind of lesson that preachers either avoid or stumble over, because the culture at large in which we live and of which we are very much a part deals with the whole issue so very badly. Most so-called "enlightened" or "well-educated" people consider such stories from Scripture to be "carry-overs" from a dark and ignorant past; in our time, people think that any talk about demons or the devil should be interpreted as the ignorance of a pre-scientific age, before the time of psychology or pharmacology; they think that such texts as this are to be interpreted metaphorically at best, or else pushed aside in favor of a more scientific world view in which everything can be explained by chemical imbalances, bad parenting, terrible experiences or other traumas. Sometimes that is true. The Orthodox Church does not denigrate the importance of the psychological, or medical or pharmaceutical sciences. I have often referred members of my parishes to physicians, psychologists or psychiatrists for treatment. But the truth of the matter is that demons are nevertheless real; the Holy Fathers bear witness to the truth of their existence, and not a few of us have had our own personal and distressing experiences of encounters with them. The very strength of their danger to us is centered in the lie that they do not exist.

Demons usually do not behave as we see them portrayed in Hollywood, however, with crass and frightening terror. Demons usually are far more subtle. They work in secret, in the darkness of temptation, half-truths, suave and seemingly reasonable suggestion. They cannot take a person or control a person against his or her will, and if a person is baptized in Christ, they cannot force themselves into possession of one who is united to Christ at all. However, even one who is baptized and joined to Christ can fall and grow into the habit of sin, making the kind of consistently selfish choices that violate the commandments and deny the love of God that is freely proffered to all. When sin becomes habit, then the demons have a much easier time; they find a home with such a person and “befriend” the person and hang around, so to speak; they tempt and beguile and lead one to the making of consistently self-defeating and self-destructive behaviors that eventually destroy – just as their entrance into the herd of swine led the dumb animals to run over the cliff in an act of self-destruction that has become the very symbol of the wages of sin.

For all of these reasons, the Orthodox Church takes lessons such as we heard on Sunday very seriously indeed. The first act of one who enters the Church into the Catechumenate is having the priest or bishop lay his hands upon them and declare war on any demons who might be present, within or without. To be joined to Christ is always to declare war on the enemies of God; it is to put oneself directly and forthrightly on the side of the God of Truth, the God of Love, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to spit – literally and figuratively - into the face of Satan and all his angels and all his pride and all his falsehood.

There are many conditions that simply cannot be fixed by modern medicine or by psychological practice, useful and beneficial though such practices are. There are many conditions, many elemental and basic conditions, that only Christ can cure. When we say that the Church is a hospital for sinners, we are not merely speaking metaphorically or offering a nice alternative to everything else. We mean it powerfully and strongly, as powerfully and strongly as we mean anything that we say. Apart from Christ, Brothers and Sisters, there is really no hope for any of us. We must run to Him with all our ills, with every problem, with issues both large and small, with issues that are clearly otherwise impossible and perplexing. Without Him, we can do nothing; but with Him, our Lord and Savior, the demons can be cast aside and out; the impossible become possible; death itself ceases to be the end, but rather a new beginning through the great love and mercy of our God Who cast out the legion from the poor man in our lesson.

So it is that St. Paul could say, “Whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.” These too are not mere words. If we ask, He will answer; if we call upon Him, He will respond; if we go to Him with the simple faith of a little child, His hand will be laid on our heads with gentleness and immediacy. How can we call, however, if we refuse to acknowledge the problem, if we do not face the truth of the seriousness of our situation?

The Church above all things, Brothers and Sisters, is a hospital. And we are the patients. Our Great Physician, Jesus Christ, waits for us to ask. As we hear every week, *Let us make no long tarrying!* For every need, every problem, every ill, every danger, every insecurity – He waits; His Hand is raised in blessing, ready to cast out that which overpowers us, ready to heal and help and guide and give strength and overcome that which afflicts us. But we must come to the Hospital He provides, His Church. Only there can we find help. ***To Him, our Great Physician, be all Honor and Glory forever!***

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!* Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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