



SIXTH SUNDAY OF LUKE

October 22

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 8:26-39

[The Gadarene Demoniac]

At that time, as Jesus arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, there met him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes and he lived not in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beseech you, do not torment me." For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him; he was kept under guard, and bound with chains and fetters, but he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the desert.)

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them leave. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what happened, they fled, and told it in the city and in the country. Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told them how he who had been possessed with demons was healed.

Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gadarenes asked him to depart from them; for they were seized with great fear; so he got into the boat and returned.



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The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but he sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

THE SERMON

Jesus' encounter with the man possessed by evil spirits (called a "demoniac" here) is a picture of His encounter with humanity, and even with each one of us individually. We read that Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee and arrived at the eastern shore, in "the country of the Gadarenes." This was a region controlled by the town of Gadara, one of the ten cities of the Decapolis (present-day southern Golan Heights). That area was inhabited by Gentiles, that is, people were not Jewish and therefore did not follow the Law of Moses. This becomes evident by the presence of pigs being raised nearby, which the Jewish law prohibited. It was not uncommon for evil spirits to oppress people in those regions, since the Gentiles who lived there did not know the God of Israel. They practiced paganism, worshiping the deities of the local area and practicing magical rites. This invites such spirits to influence their worshippers.

It is as Jesus enters a cemetery area that he encounters the man who was afflicted by evil spirits. Everything about the man pointed to the reality of pain and suffering. He was homeless and lived among the tombs. In a real sense, his life was a living death. He was also naked, as his dignity as a human being had been stripped of him. He was chained, and so he was in bondage. He had to be kept from hurting himself and others. When Jesus comes to him, what takes place is the miracle of Light dispelling darkness, the illumination not only of a place but of a life to be restored.

When the man sees Jesus, immediately the evil spirits who lived in him cry out, in terror, begging Him not to torment them. The spirits immediately recognized God incarnate standing in front of them, and they desperately feared Him. Addressing the man, Jesus asks for the spirits' name. This is not because Jesus did not know, but so that we can know that evil spirits can oppress and even possess those who invite them. The spirits answer that their name was "Legion." This was a term used by the Roman military of the time, denoting a group of about 6,000 men. The spiritual state of that man was dire, as many evil spirits were ravaging his mind, body, and soul.

However, Jesus came to that man because Jesus loved him. He is God the Son, and evil spirits are spiritual creatures who oppose God and those made in the image and

likeness of God. They fear Jesus, and as He commands them to leave the man, so he can be restored to life, the evil spirits beg Him not to send them to the dark spiritual regions, the “abyss,” but rather that they may go into animals, in this case, the pigs being farmed in the region.

Pigs were considered unclean by the Jewish law, and so they were symbolically apt for a temporary dwelling for the unclean spirits. Jesus permits them to go, and the pigs rush off the cliff and drown in the water below. They were not permitted to take the life of the man but were permitted to show their destructive power only with the animals, because the Lord loved and delivered the man, as He does with us.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria says, “the God of all purposely permits some to fall into [the power of evil spirits] . . . yet, it will never happen that those who love Christ will become subject to them. It will never happen to us as long as we walk in his footsteps, avoid negligence in the performance of what is right, desire those things which are honorable, and belong to that virtuous and praiseworthy lifestyle that Christ has marked out for us by the precepts of the gospel.”

When the pig farmers saw what happened, they spread the word in their city and region. Instead of rejoicing that Jesus had sent away the evil spirits who had reduced a man’s life to a state lower than animals, they feared and asked Him to leave. They did so because they cared more about their pig farming business than the deliverance of a poor man. God cares about each one of us more than we ourselves do, because His love has no bounds.

The man who was living among the tombs is now at the feet of Jesus, which is the place of abundant life. He who lived in the shame of nakedness is now fully clothed. This points to us being clothed with our baptismal robe. The man’s dignity is restored, and he is covered by the love and mercy of God. He who was in chains and bondage is now free. He who did not have control over his thoughts and actions is now in his right mind. The Lord restored him, body and soul. Instead of the tombs, the place of death, he is now at the Lord’s feet, who is the Creator of life. Instead of being naked, he is now clothed with the wedding garment of the Kingdom of God. Instead of demonic influence, he is now in his right mind, a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus says to us, that He has come so that we may have life, even abundant life.

The man who had begged the Lord to depart from him now begs Him to be with the Lord. However, as God’s grace in our lives results in praise, thanksgiving, and in a testimony to others of the love of God, now this very man becomes an apostle to the region of Gadara. Jesus commissions him and tells him to return to his home and declare how much God has done for him.

The man went, proclaiming throughout the whole area how much Jesus had done for him. As Saint John Chrysostom says, Jesus, leaving “those who had proclaimed themselves unworthy of His teaching, appoints as their teacher the man who had been released from the evil spirits.” The whole story is one of reversal from darkness to light, from oppression to freedom, and from death to life.

The encounter with Jesus brought that man back to life, to dignity, and to freedom. Jesus went to him because He loved him. Jesus always comes to us in His love. In this world, we find ourselves in dark places, and we feel trapped by our own circumstances, by those who might mistreat us, and by our own sins and mistakes. We might feel as though our dignity is stripped from us in an unjust society and by broken relationships. And we become fragmented, our minds and hearts scattered in many directions.

Sometimes we feel as though we might be internally divided, as our minds and our will can be at odds with each other and with our hearts. Yet, Christ loves us and comes to us to deliver us from death, bondage, and sin. He destroyed death by His Resurrection, and it has no more power over us, because He gives us eternal life. He heals our hearts and minds, what the Fathers call the "nous," and heals our fragmentation to make us whole and peaceful, clothed and in our right minds.

Jesus defeated the demons on the Cross, and they flee from Him. He dispels our darkness with His presence because He is the Light of the world. He restores us to our right minds through His Word, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Let us sit at His feet in prayer, seeking His presence above all things, and leaving behind everything in this world that seeks to enslave us and take us far from God. He loves us, He is our restoration, and He gives us life in abundance.