

**5TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JUNE 18/JULY 1, 2007**

ROMANS 10: 1-10

ST. MATTHEW 8: 28-9: 1

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Calming The Storms Of The Soul

The Gospel begins with “At that time....” What time was that? The time St. Matthew referred to was when Christ saved His disciples from drowning in “a great tempest in the sea”. So we begin with a discussion of that exercise of faith:¹

And when He was entered into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with waters: but He was asleep. (St. Matthew 8: 23-24)

Jesus saved them from this peril that he ‘created’ for this purpose. But He allowed them to suffer the fear of drowning as one of the trials and tribulations they would customarily face. Christ slept whilst the storm rocked the boat for them to realise “their own powerlessness and pray to Him to save them and to rescue them from disaster”.²

The Apostles awakened Him saying *Lord, save us: we perish*. To this He responded *Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?* He didn't label them as unbelievers, but of "little faith".³ Saying, Lord save us – that displayed faith, but adding "we perish" indicates they lacked it; otherwise, why add it?

Since Christ was sailing together with them, they should **not** have been afraid and terrified. He reproaches them, therefore, for being fearful, and He shows that their fear and insufficient faith lead to misfortunes and perils. First, He calms the storm in their **souls**, and then He puts a stop to the billows of the sea and the storminess of the air. As it is written, Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm.⁴

Christ's Ship And Its Rudder

According to the Fathers, we can look at this in another (analogous) way. The boat (ship) is the Church of Christ, the One Holy Catholic & Apostolic Church, the True Orthodox Church. The captain of the vessel of Christ is considered to be those in holy orders. In the ship, also, are the faithful, men, women and children alike. Christ abides in them forever; however, fierce storms will assail His ship and "thousands of adverse waves assault this holy ship". The evil spirits direct many tribulations against our ship "throwing it into that same mortal fear (felt by the Apostles)".⁵

Even though Christ is always with us, he allows our being battered about by temptations, trials and tribulations to test our spiritual mettle:

When the storm is truly overwhelming, and a cruel and disastrous end is in sight, and the sailors can no longer withstand the flood, then we have only to run to the all-powerful and merciful God, crying out to Him with fervent prayers and warm tears and saying, Rise up, why sleepest Thou, O Lord? Arise and cast us not off at the end. Wherefore turnest Thou Thy face away? Dost Thou forget our poverty and our affliction? Surely the Lord will arise quickly and will utterly dispel all fear.⁶

Christ's ship is kept on course by His revelations to us through the testimonies and martyrdoms of the Apostles, Fathers of the True Church, and First Seven Ecumenical Councils + accepted Regional Councils, as found in *The Rudder (Pedalion)*.⁷

All we need to do is call upon Him when we are under attack by demonic forces, and He will answer! God has more pity for us than we do for ourselves.⁸

The Demons Quake

Upon coming to the other side into the land of the Gergesenes, two possessed of demons met the Lord. The demons although fierce, quake at His coming and ended up proclaiming Christ to be Son of God. They had no doubt:

*And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?*⁹

They “unwittingly proclaim the invincible power of the Saviour and Son of God”. They were concerned that he had come to deal with them, as they said, “before the time”:

The demons thought that Christ would not wait for the time appointed for their punishment, but would torment them ahead of time, being unwilling to endure the intensification of their malice against man. But this is not so; till the very end, brethren, the demons are allowed by God to wage war on us. Our enemies, however, suffer this torment: they are not permitted by Christ to injure us as they wish.¹⁰

The demons play a part in Christ’s agenda even as evil as they are. We will withstand them with the Lord’s help. The demons then ask Christ if they can go into a nearby herd of swine. Their idea was to drown them thereby so upsetting their owner that he would turn against the Lord and not accept Him.¹¹ Note that they ask Christ if they could go into the swine herd. They acknowledge His power over the swine, a power they do not have “unless God so permits”.¹²

God has power over all things, animals, humans, inanimate objects, and, indeed, even demons. “There is no one whom His providence and His grace do not reach; He extends His good care to everyone, as the Lover of mankind.”¹³

The Loss Of The Herd And The Fleeing Of Their Keepers

Christ gave them permission to go into the swine herd. It was the better of options apparently. “If they were not restrained by God, the demons would do far worse to us than they did to those swine.” Christ preserved the possessed men from getting killed. The herd ran violently down into the sea and died in the waters. The herd’s keepers fled into the city and spread the ‘news’.

The people in the city did not understand or believe that this was the chance for their salvation. They were concerned about their losses and had they not suffered such a loss would not have met or sought out Jesus. But they didn’t see the spiritual opportunity as that. Rather, the Gergesenes were worried that “worse things would yet befall them”. So, they exchanged eternity for fear of a temporal loss. This loss of their possessions didn’t lead them to God. They wouldn’t go for eternity, they took the short view. If they aren’t willing to go through tribulations and trials, they cannot go into God’s kingdom.¹⁴

The swine-herds and those who were delivered from the demons remained to tell and proclaim the miracles which had been done. Let us also learn that Christ does not abide where a swinish life, with its mire and stench, is found.¹⁵

...

You, O reader, learn that where there is swinish life, it is not Christ who dwells there, but demons.¹⁶

Capernaum

Christ came into His own city, meaning “Capernaum, where Christ used to dwell”. He was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth and was a regular resident of Capernaum.¹⁷ Christ had resided for an extended time period in Capernaum.¹⁸

We should consider a number of things in the Gospel today, which will help us navigate life’s challenges from the prince of darkness. Remember, we will be tested; there is no other option available. He will be with us always, but Christ allows us to be battered about by tribulations; and, sometimes even go to the brink indeed. We must place our full faith in Him, throw ourselves on His mercy and under His power when these trials come. We are powerless to do it alone.

He will calm our spiritual seas. We are all sailors in the Ship of Christ, captained by the True Orthodox clergy and following *The Rudder* to combat the evil forces and stay on course. The demons will be with us throughout, but we will win against them with God’s grace. If you are having a serious trial in your life at this moment, consider it a “wake up” call and come to Holy Orthodoxy. Take the long view for eternity, not the short one!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ See the interesting comments in *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba), Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, p. 299-302.

² *ibid.*, p. 299.

³ *id.*, pp. 299-300.

⁴ *id.*, p. 300.

⁵ *id.*, pp. 300-301.

⁶ *id.*, p. 301.

⁷ See St. James The Just True Orthodox Spiritual Center, <http://www.stjamesthejust.com/>, Canons of the Fathers, Ecumenical and Regional Councils with Interpretation from *The Rudder*, at <http://www.stjamesthejust.com/links.html>.

⁸ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁹ Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 73-74.

¹⁰ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 304.

¹¹ *id.*

¹² *id.*, p. 305.

¹³ *id.*

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 306.

¹⁵ *id.*

¹⁶ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 306.

¹⁸ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 76.