

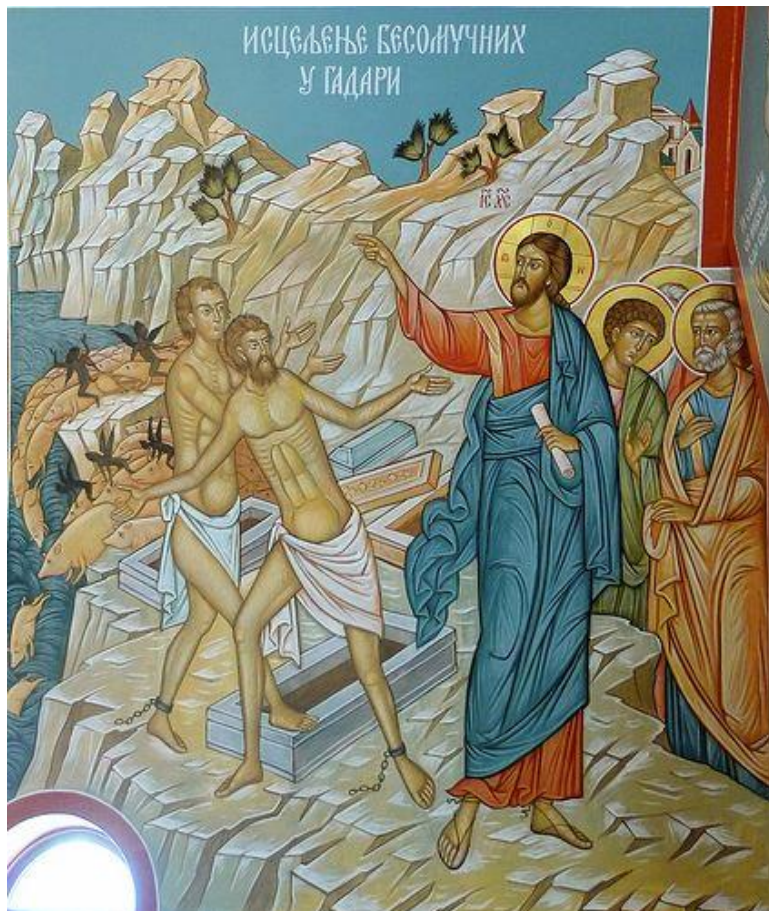
Homily Reflection - 21st Sunday After Pentecost

The Healing of the Demon-Possessed Man

In the first reading we hear about a time when the Church was dealing with one of its first heresies. The root word for "heresy" in Greek means "to choose." When one chooses his own personal opinion or one element of the Christian faith and ignores the rest of it, this can become a heresy. As some call it, it's "Pick'n & Choos'n." also known as "Cafeteria Christianity." It's accepting the stuff we like and passing on the stuff we don't like.

But a heretic isn't just a person who simply makes a theological mistake in belief. It's someone (1) who teaches error, (2) is formally corrected by the Church, and (3) still obstinately persists in error.

At this time the heresy being promoted in the Church was by some Jewish Christians who thought that to be a Christian, one also had to first become a Jew and keep the many Old Testament ritual laws (like circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary laws).



But Christianity is not based on ethnicity nor on dead ritual, but on "faith in Christ." As St. Paul states, "man is not justified by the works of the law but by FAITH in Jesus Christ."

We don't enter heaven based on the merits of our good works or keeping a bunch of rituals. If good works were all it took to get to heaven, we wouldn't have needed the precious blood of Christ which was poured out for our salvation. To be saved, we must have a real, loving and transformative relationship with God.

Baptism begins this relationship and immerses us into the life of God. But then we have to do our part to develop that relationship with Him. We must pray, we must study His Word, we must receive Him in His Holy Sacraments & Mysteries and we must serve Him with our lives. And we must tell others about His truth.

A lot of people are uneasy about sharing their faith with others. But the Prophet Ezekiel warned, if we see someone doing something that will lead to their damnation and we warn them, if they do it and end up being lost, we will not be held responsible. But if we see someone doing something that is wrong and we don't warn him, that person may be lost but we will be held responsible.

St. Paul, The Apostle, sums this up when he states:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ [Who] lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

In today's Gospel we hear about a man possessed with demons. If you've ever read about demon possession, you know it's not a very pleasant thing.

In this story the demon-possessed man is so bad he has to be kept in chains and shackles to protect him from hurting himself and others. Even the name he gives for himself is "Legion" because many demons had entered him.

Here the incarnate & only-begotten Son of God comes face to face with evil and conquers it! Jesus casts out the legion of demons into the swine and they all run down the hill and destroy themselves.

Evil always seeks to do harm and destroy. It does us personal harm, it harms our relationships with others, our marriages (bringing in anger, distrust and even adultery), it harms our culture and society and our morality like promoting immoral relationships & sex outside of marriage, the redefinition of marriage and the legalizing euthanasia and abortion.

Just as we saw with the pigs: evil always seeks to destroy us and everything good in our lives.

Jesus came to destroy evil and its power over us. He came to help & empower us to turn back to God our loving Father and to help us restore our lost likeness to Him.

As we enter into Halloween in this country let us keep this Gospel and the truths of our faith in mind. Recall where the word Halloween itself comes from.

In pre-Christian Ireland there was an evil pagan celebration of the dead whom the Celts believed revisited the earth on the last day of the year (Oct 31st). The Latin Church, alarmed by this celebration, decided to try to overcome evil with good.

So they moved the celebration of All Saints from the day we celebrate it (a week aft Pentecost), to October 31st to encourage the people to celebrate the feast of All Hallows Eve or "the Evening of All the Holy" instead of the evening of the evil spirits.

It's one thing to innocently joke and tease about being scared but another to actually celebrate evil. In many ways people today are celebrating evil and promoting it.

As followers of Christ let us never forget what demons and devils really are and what they seek to influence us to do: Horrible things like what happened recently in Las Vegas. Let us celebrate what is HOLY and never what is evil.

Our country desperately needs God and his truth. This goes back to our first reading. Too many have turned away from God, into heresy, secularism and even atheism. To see what the world looks like without Jesus, all we have to do is look around us (or turn on the evening news).

But Christians always have great reason for hope because Christ is Risen!

As the chanters sang in today's troparion, "The joyful message of the resurrection was heard by the women disciples from the angel, and being freed from the ancestral curse, they boasted to the apostles: Death is despoiled, Christ our God is risen, giving great mercy to the world."

Jesus told the man freed from the demons, to return to his own house, and tell what great things God had done for him." And [the man] went... and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

If we don't want to live in a world dominated by evil, in a world where evil is celebrated and triumphs, let us not be Cafeteria Christians, let us shun heresy and embrace the full faith revealed by God and follow this with our whole lives.

Let Christ triumph over evil in us. Only then will He triumph over evil in our land.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

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Sub-Deacon Lazarus Der-Ghazarian

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