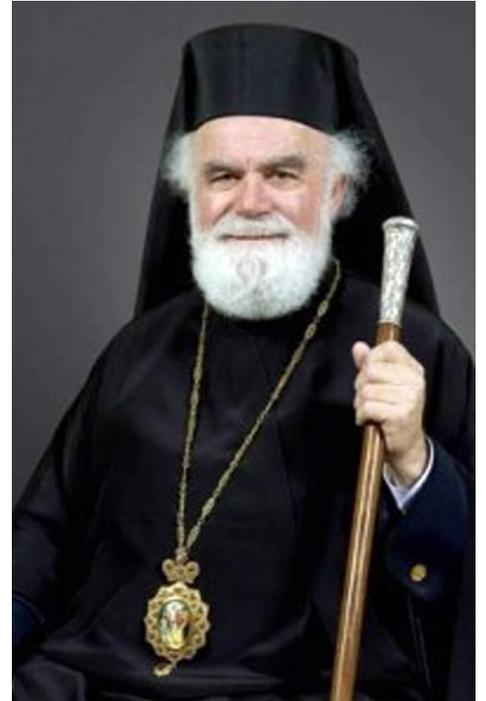


My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday's Gospel, we read of a man who is along amongst his friends and neighbors. He begins abandoned as an outcast, imprisoned by the Evil One, but ends as a grateful servant of God, alone singing his praises, while his friends and neighbors have all fled away. It seems that the Evangelist asks, who will we choose to be?

Jesus is passing through the region of Gadarenes, when He encounters a man possessed by demons. St. Luke tells us that this man approached Jesus from among the tombs, and we know from Christ's encounters with other demoniacs, that such unfortunate persons were often expelled from their communities into cemeteries, or even chained. This was done for the safety of the community, but looking deeper, we can see also a lack of compassion on the part of his family and neighbors. This demoniac may be under the sway of the Evil One's influence, but who among men is not tempted, or spiritually untouched by weaknesses?



Unlike the self-preservation shown by the townspeople, Christ shows no fear of the demoniac, though the legion of demons clearly fear the God-Man. Christ approaches the man, and sensing that Christ will free the man's soul of this great burden, the demons ask to instead be expelled into a herd of swine. The rest of the Gospel is well known: how the swine perished, drowning on the bank of a nearby lake; and how the townspeople, alerted by the frightened herdsmen, rushed out to see the former demoniac, now sitting near Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.

The unexpected ending however, is that instead of reacting with wonder or amazement at our Lord's generosity and fearlessness, the townspeople were terrified, and begged Christ to depart. Surely this miracle was a frightening thing to witness and overhear, but we should ask: are we like the townspeople, who cast off their troubled fellow man, and then fearfully beg the Word of God to depart; or will we instead recognize the miraculous opportunity we have to be made spiritually whole ourselves?

Only through fasting, prayer, and sincere repentance will we be less like the crowd of townspeople, and more like the grateful man, who later followed Christ's instructions: returning to his home, thanking and praising God. Though in his mission to proclaim Christ, he may have been as alone as he was when he was outcast, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he was now surrounded by the angels and saints. May we too choose to be as brave and fearless, not turning away from God, but instead, praising Him for all the blessings He has brought us in our lives.

+ALEXIOS

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