



HOLY TRINITY

ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

CHURCH BULLETIN

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The 5th Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Reading **Matthew 8: 29 - 9: 1**

At that time, when Jesus came to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one would pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of

swine." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, and what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood. And getting into a boat he crossed over

Apostle Reading **Romans 10: 1 - 10**

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified. Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart,

"Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.



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Synaxarion. Sunday July 25 (Fifth Sunday after Pentecost): Repose of Righteous Anna, mother of vHoly Venerable Simeon the Fool for Christ; Holy Venerable John the Faster; Holy Great Prophet Ezekiel

Sermon on the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Today's Gospel concerns the casting out of demons from two possessed men, their entry into a herd of swine and the suicide of those swine. There are several things that we can learn from this Gospel.

Firstly, we should note that the Gergesenes who owned the swine were disobeying the Jewish Law. The Jews did not and do not eat pork. The Jews who lived in this region were therefore disobeying their own Law. That is why the swineherd 'besought' Christ to leave their area, virtually chasing the Son of God away. We cannot help thinking that the disobedience of these people explains why two of them at least had become possessed.

Therefore we learn that disobedience of God leads to misfortune.

Secondly, it is clear from the Gospel that devils exist and that they can possess men. All too often we meet naïve people who call themselves Christians but have been so hoodwinked by the Devil that they maintain that devils do not exist and that they most certainly cannot enter into men. Such people have clearly not read the Gospel with understanding and have little experience of life. In this context we may ask ourselves about the meaning of the word 'possession'. The Fathers of the Church, many of whom we commemorate today, tell us that that we cannot simply become possessed overnight. Possession is the ultimate stage in a process. The first stage of that process is when we begin to surrender our free will and we 'entertain' demons and demonic thoughts in a habitual manner. The second stage is when demons come to obsess us; we are almost unable to fight against demonic influence over us. Demonic thoughts stalk us, becoming an obsession. The third stage is possession, when demons actually come to live inside us, to own or possess us as their property. This is when we have totally surrendered our free will to resist.

Therefore we learn that the Devil and demonic possession are realities.

Thirdly, in today's Gospel we should notice three characteristics of the devils. First of all, they dwell in tombs. They live in tombs because the devils are spiritually dead. Also the devils are violent, alien to the spirit of peace, 'exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way'. Finally, the devils are also believers. This should not surprise us. For the devils are bodiless, spiritual beings, fallen angels. Here we should remember that there are many sorts of spirituality, one of which is the spirituality of the demons. Unlike men, who are made foolish because they are deluded by bodily, material things, the devils see reality as it is, they see the spiritual basis of all things. Thus

they confess Christ as He really is: as the 'Son of God'. They have no illusions that Christ may only be some man, albeit a prophet, or a mere man though of great intelligence or giftedness. No, He is the Son of God and that is clear to them. The devils know spiritual reality. According to one Father of the Church, St Simeon the New Theologian, the devils lack only one thing: Love. Indeed, according to him: 'theology without love is the theology of the demons'.

Therefore we learn that Love is the abiding characteristic of God.

Lastly, we see from today's Gospel that animals may sometimes behave better than men. For what do the two men possessed by devils do? They survive, living among tombs. On the other hand, the entry of devils inside animals is enough to make them commit suicide. They cannot bear the presence of evil within them. Yet very often we hear that some people have 'behaved like animals'. This is often untrue and unjust. Animals, for example, do not kill their own species. Animals are sensitive to the presence of evil and fear the presence of supernatural demons, running away from them. This is because animals, who have no eternal, immortal souls, belong to the natural world and fear the supernatural. Men, on the other hand, belong partly to that natural, material, bodily world, but partly to the spiritual world. They are therefore subject to the influence of spirits, whether the spirits of God from the angelic world, or else to the spirits of Evil, from Satan.

Therefore we learn that we are all subject to spiritual influences, to the spirit of evil or to the spirit of good.

What are we to do? Let us flee the spirit of evil. Otherwise we too will finish by living in the tombs of the spiritually dead. Otherwise we too will be owned by devils and none will pass our way. Otherwise we too will run 'violently down a steep place into the sea and perish in the waters'.

And let us instead of all this cleave to the Spirit of God, which we know from the Gospels, from the Apostles, from the Fathers and from the Saints of the Church of God. Amen.

Fr. Andrew Phillips

(Source: <http://orthodoxengland.org.uk/>)

Homily for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

One of my favorite stories about parish life was about a retired Russian priest who kept getting called back to substitute for the regular parish priest when he went on vacation. It was about the same time each year and it seemed to fall on the same Gospel reading, the one we heard today. The old priest went to the ambon and said,



“Again, with the pigs! Always with the pigs!” I love telling this story. Many of you have already heard me tell it and are probably thinking.... “again with the ‘again with the pigs’ story.” Sometimes, though, good things are worth re-telling.

Why do we tell this same story over and over again every year? What is it about the demons that get sent into the pigs? What is it about the men who are possessed by demons that draws our attention? Look again....the story is not really about the pigs and demons, nor is it about the men who are demon possessed.

It’s about us. Of course the whole of the Scriptures is about “us.” We’re taught to see ourselves in them. That is one of the ways they become relevant to our lives in this century (or any century). More specifically it is about the sins that drive the Lord away from us.

Let us look more closely at this story; and it’s an important story if only because it’s found in three of the four Gospels with minor details being changed or emphasized. At first glance we would think the account is about the healing of demoniacs, men possessed by demons....and it is, do not get me wrong.

Next we would be interested in noting that the demons know who Christ is and they proclaim it quite loudly. Right before this passage the Lord had called Himself the Son of Man, a title of the Messiah and then he had

calmed a storm and had shown to His Disciples that he had power over the weather and the sea. His words and actions showed that He had the power of God. Now we have the demons admitting who He is. While it’s good to have something confirmed by others, the Lord had already shown Who He is; and considering the source, it might not have

been a good thing for demons to be proclaiming Who Jesus is. What better ammunition against Him? The Pharisees and Scribes could have said, “See, the demons proclaim that he is the Son of God and everyone knows the demons are liars!” No, the Lord did enough to convince others of his status. He did not need the word of demons to back him up.

Then the demons ask to be sent into the pigs. This actually shows the powerlessness of the demons. Yes, the pigs are driven by the demons into the sea and destroyed, but, you will note, the possessed men were not. The Fathers point out that the destruction of the pigs shows how mad for destruction the demons are. They will even try to destroy a herd of pigs if given the chance. Note that the demons had to ask for Christ’s permission to enter into the pigs. Confronted with Christ they ask to be allowed to go into the pigs and Christ tells them “go.” This shows us that everything happens because of God’s providence. St. John Chrysostom says, “His providence is not only over all in common, but also over each in particular...” By this St. John means that God pays attention to the minutest details. As Christ told His disciples....even the hairs of their head are numbered. Even though He permits the demons to act, one will also note that God has limited the extent of their ability to harm man. Even for the unbeliever and the sinner, the Lord restrains the hand of the devil. God’s good

providence is extended to all. The demons could not destroy the men, though the pigs did not enjoy the same degree of protection that humans get. Animals are not made in the image of God. Human beings *are* and we are more precious to God than anything else.

Now saying that God allows something to happen is not, of course, the same as saying He *causes* evil things to happen. God does not cause evil. He respects free will in all things. The Lord can and does take what is evil, though and brings about something good. When Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, they meant to do evil. The Lord turned this around and made it something that would elevate Joseph to the highest levels of the Egyptian court and would be the means of preserving his family in a time of great famine. Even for us sometimes an illness can become a wakeup call and lead us to repentance and a deeper relationship with God.

Out of this whole account, though, we come to the part that is truly the most relevant to us: the reaction of the people to this miracle.

Do they marvel at the wonder He has just performed? Yes. Do they welcome the Messiah into their midst, ask for forgiveness for raising swine in the first place (an occupation that was forbidden to Jews), and repent? No. They tell Christ to leave. Actually, they *beg* Christ to leave them. Perhaps they were afraid He was going to destroy their whole livelihood right then and there! Their greed for monetary gain, selling pigs to the gentiles, blinded them to the treasure that stood before them. Here was the Pearl of Great Price and they desired the swine instead. Later when Christ would send His disciples out into the countryside to preach to the villages he would tell them that when they came to a household or village that was worthy to let their peace (Christ's peace) come upon it. If they were unworthy and did not accept them, then the disciples' peace would return to them and they were to shake the dust from their sandals as a sign against that place. "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city." says the Lord concerning the cities that reject Him and His disciples. Pig farming in Palestine doesn't seem to have been such a good idea back then...especially if it meant losing salvation. The people made their free choice, though...as we all must do in our lifetimes. St. Gregory Palamas points out in his homily on the version of this story that is in the Gospel of Luke, that it is easy to feel sorry for those who are tormented by demons, who are possessed by them. We feel great pity for them. We feel less pity, though, for those who are murderers, thieves, the arrogant,

misers and any other kinds of sinners (though, in truth, we should). St. Gregory explains, "This is because the man in the demon's power falls into evil passions against his will, whereas the lover of sin embraces evil of his own free will, often concealing just how destructive and malignant his disease is." St. Gregory rightly calls these sinners "more wretched than those who are obviously possessed by demons." When demoniacs die, he writes, "they cast off the demon's influence along with their body, but unrepentant sinners have an everlasting affliction, which cannot be thrown off." We see this in this passage when we see that the people who have turned their backs on God's ways, beg Christ to depart from them. Sadder still, He does.

The dramatic healing of the possessed in the Scriptures is not meant to scare us into fearing demon possession. It teaches us a very blunt lesson because, frankly, sometimes we need to be told things very bluntly. I know that I do. The healings of the demoniacs is a means of showing that it is God; it is Jesus Christ, who has the power to liberate us from the power of the demons and the power of sin in our lives. As St. Gregory puts it, "He also cast out demons from those whose bodies were obviously possessed, and through this liberation and healing carried out openly, He gave proof and confirmation of the release and cure effected secretly in their souls." One will note that the Lord did this with many of the other healings He performed. First he healed the soul, then the physical malady. Next Sunday we will hear of one such instance in the healing of the paralytic.

In the end the question to ask ourselves when we read today's Gospel is do we beg the Lord to leave us when we consciously persist in our sins, when we choose our own desires over His? If we find that we must answer yes, it is vitally important that we then remember the story of *another* keeper of pigs who did the same thing...and this is the key to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Who is that other pig farmer who came to himself and longed for his true home? He is the Prodigal Son. We know from the Lord's own lips that those who have left the Father's home can return and that we will be welcomed home with open arms. With the same will we used to push Christ away from us, we can cry out to Him to return.

Fr. Philip Kontos

(Source: <https://www.stpeterjupiter.org>)



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Fr. Andrew Phillips



HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from July 25 to August 31, 2021

Sunday July 25 (Fifth Sunday after Pentecost):

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

11:00 am - Sunday School

11:45 am Memorial Service,
Fam-Marmaliuc

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour

Sunday July 28 (Sixth Sunday after Pentecost):

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour

