

The Reading is From the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (8:27-39; Gal. 1:11-19)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

In today's Gospel we hear of a man possessed by demons. Evil spirits are not the product of unenlightened people of an unenlightened era. It seems that Christ, who came into the world to enlighten us to the Truth of God and unite us to Him, could have thought us that demons weren't real. These evil spirits are not a metaphor for evil, nor are they a way of describing sin or sickness. The truth is that demons are real. They are light bodied creatures who in their pride rejected God and were cast from Heaven into the lower parts of our atmosphere. And they can affect mankind by suggestion of thoughts, attacking, by forming relationships with us, and even by possession.

If we accept the idea that demons don't exist; that they are a metaphor or product of uneducated people then we fooling ourselves, for the Fathers of the Church who were better educated in knowledge of God did not deny these things. Who are we, who poor in the knowledge of God to say otherwise? Are we are our own teachers? Or did we receive the faith as students?

Moreover, if we deny these the existence of evil spirits then we deny something of Christ and our salvation. For it was Christ, as St. Paul says, who by the cross disarmed, openly made a spectacle of, and triumphed over the powers and principalities, the rulers of the darkness of this age, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. St. Athanasius, when talking about the incarnation, says that one of the purposes of Christ's dying on the cross was to battle and defeat the demons that lurk in the air so as to make a path for us to heaven.

Why then does God allow the demons to tempt, attack, and on rare occasions possess people? Why does He allow anything; sickness, war, natural disasters, and so on? These things are consequences of the fall. Nevertheless, God allows these things to happen so as to awaken us to His love and power when He restrains these things, to bring us to repentance, and to show us ferocity of the devil toward us. When we suffer any trial or temptation, no matter the source, it is an opportunity to choose God. It's the

same with demonic affliction: it is an opportunity to choose God and give us yet another chance to win the crown of glory.

But we can certainly open ourselves up to the devil's tyranny. We do this by sinning and loving it, although the Church is clear that those who are possessed are not worse sinner than those who do not have a demon. We can also come under the attack of the devil whenever we accept false visions, false ideas that come our way, or when we accept heterodox teachings, morals, and practices.

Another way in which we invite demons into our lives is by getting involved in occult and pagan practices. Astrology, horoscopes, fortunetelling, tarot cards, Ouija boards, and the like are open invitations to the devil. Pagan religions are too. Yoga, awakening the chakras, Zen meditation, having little Buddha statues and so forth are practices meant to achieve the spiritual goals of religions that are antithetical, not in line with, opposed to Christianity.

Now, the Fathers of the Church teach us, Christ teaches us, that there is something worse than demonic affliction, and that is to become possessed by our own passions. See, attack from evil spirits come from outside of ourselves, but possession by the passions is a self-inflicted and thus worse wound. We live in an age when this is a great danger- to turn away from God and turn inward on ourselves. When we seek after the lusts of the flesh we are truly no different from the evil spirits who know that Jesus is the Son of the Most high, but who do not acknowledge that true in their deeds. When we seek after the things of the world we are like those who say "Lord, Lord," but who do not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

We must not give into every impulse of the flesh or entertain every fantasy of the mind. This is why keeping watch over our hearts and confession are so important; they keep us from taking our eyes off God, they soften our hearts making them fertile ground for the Word of God to take root in us and bear much fruit. We must be strong in the Lord, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Our weapons are not planes and ships, chariots and horses, but truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the sword of Spirit which is the word of God, watchfulness, prayer and humility.

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