My Beloved Ones,

This week’s Gospel we come to witness a great miracle: the healing of two demoniacs who lived among the tombs of the Gergesenes. These poor possessed people, St. Matthew tells us, were “...so fierce that no one would pass that way” (Matthew 8:28). To be honest, the story of the miracle itself is well-known: “Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. The demons begged him, ‘If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.’ And he said to them, ‘Go!’ So they came out and entered the swine; and suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and perished in the water” (Matthew 8:30). However, what I wish to focus on is a detail that can often be missed.

Notice that even the demons recognize that Jesus is Lord: “Suddenly they shouted, ‘What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?’” (Matthew 8:29) There is perhaps a special kind of humor that even these evil beings show more honor than the townspeople: “Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood” (Matthew 8:34). However, there is an important spiritual reality that speaks to the importance of believing in Christ, confessing that belief, and then living out that belief.

St. Paul says in this week’s Epistle to the Romans: “But the righteousness that comes from 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’; 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 one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved” (Romans 10:6-10). I do not mean to suggest that the demons will be saved, or that townspeople will be condemned, but St. Matthew is using irony to show that even the demons seem to have more fear of Jesus than those who should be grateful.

However, the townspeople are so focused on protecting their lives & comforts, that they force Christ to leave them. Perhaps we often focus on the details of the miracle (the pigs & the cliff) so that we do not have to ask ourselves difficult questions: is the word near us? Do we confess with our lips & believe in our heart; or instead, do we tell Jesus to leave us, remembering Him only on Sunday, forgetting Him as we go about our obligations during the other days of the week? My prayer is that this Gospel message will help strengthen our relationship to the Lord, so that, as the passage ends, we will not be the townspeople; instead, we will be with Him as He gets into the boat, crosses over, and comes into His own city (Matthew 9:1).

+ALEXIOS
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