



My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday's Gospel, we will meet a man who is alone among his friends and neighbors. He begins abandoned as an outcast, imprisoned through possession by the Evil One, but he ends the passage as a grateful servant of God, alone, singing his praises, while his friends and neighbors have all fled. It seems that St. Luke the Evangelist is asking us, 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, and even kept in chains. 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 influence

of the Evil One, but can any of these townspeople say that they are spiritually perfect?

Unlike the selfishness of the townspeople, Christ shows no fear of the demoniac—though the legion of demons fears the God-Man. Our Lord approaches him with compassion, and since the demons know that Christ will free the man's soul, they ask to be expelled into a herd of swine. The rest of the Gospel is well-known: how the swine drowned in nearby lake, and how the frightened herdsmen told the town's citizens, who 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 joy at our Lord's generosity, 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 throw away their troubled fellow man, and then fearfully beg the Word of God to leave us alone; 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 scared and materialistic townspeople, and more like the grateful man, who later followed Christ's instructions: returning to his home, thanking, and praising God. Though he may have been as alone in his mission to proclaim Christ as he was when he was an outcast, he had the satisfaction of knowing that he was now surrounded not by the invisible presence of the Devil & his demons, but instead by God's angels and His saints.

May we too choose to be as brave and fearless as this Man, not turning away from God, but instead, seeking his forgiving and healing love—and then praising Him for all the blessings He has brought us in our lives.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta