



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 24 JULY 2016

SUNDAY OF THE GERGESENE DEMONIACS

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Romans [10:1-10]

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) 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, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

EXPLANATION: The Jews failed to perceive that **“Christ is the end”** and goal of their law; that **everyone who has faith** in Christ might receive God’s righteousness and favour. They believed that the law is an end to itself; that man was made for the Sabbath, and that they were made to find life and fulfilment in the Law forever. They do not see that the Law’s supremacy in Israel is temporary, not eternal, and how it is merely one stage in their pilgrimage, not their final goal. Christ is that final goal, and the Law was given to lead Israel to Him. It is through faith in Christ that righteousness is bestowed on **“everyone who has faith”**. (10:1-4) God has revealed the Word (Christ) to them and all that remains is for them to respond with loyalty and obedience. They don’t need to **“ascend to heaven”** nor to **“descend into the abyss”** to see that Christ is their Saviour. Rather, Christ has come down from heaven; has risen from the dead, and is even now accessible to the believer by faith. Christ is **“in the mouth and heart”** of every believer. He is **“near”** within the reach of every Christian. The Christian can now **“confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus and have faith in his heart that God raised Him from the dead and so be saved.”** (10:5-9)

GOSPEL The Reading is from the Gospel of St Matthew [8:28-34, 9:1]

When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time? Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, “If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine. And He said to them, “Go”. So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water. Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region. So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.

EXPLANATION: Jesus and His disciples left Capernaum which was their **own city** and which served as their headquarters and travelled across the Sea of Galilee to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes by a small boat. Jesus calmed the storm and His disciples were amazed that even the winds and sea obeyed Him. There they met two men, coming out of the tombs, possessed with demons. They were mentally deranged, aggressive and self-destructive. They dwelt amongst the tombs either because demons wish to inspire the belief that the souls of those who have died become demons or because they were forced to leave the village which was a great distance away. Jesus came alone towards them, since no one dared to bring them to Him. **(8:28)** The demons in them recognize Jesus as the **Son of God**. They know they have nothing in common with Him, for Jesus seeks man's salvation, whereas they seek to destroy mankind because of their envy that man has been raised to the heavenly heights where they were prior to the fall and expulsion from heaven. But Jesus' presence torments them, disturbs them. They consider it torment to be prevented from harming men. They are surprised that their power is being terminated **before the time** of the Last Judgment. They thought that Christ, not enduring their great wickedness and because they know Jesus rescues people from the devil's control that He would not wait for the time of their punishment. But this is not so; for the demons are permitted to contend with us until the end of the world. **(8:29)** The demons asked Jesus that if He has decided to cast them out of the men, then at least allow them to go into the herd of swine. They asked this so that they could drown the swine, and thus the owners would be grieved and would not welcome Christ. Jesus granted the demons their request in order to show how great is their bitterness towards men, and that if they had the power, and were not prevented as they are by God, they would do far worse things to us than they did for the swine. **(8:30-31)** The demons entering the **swine** (which were unclean for

the Jews), is a sign of the reality of the demoniacs' healing. Jesus' sovereign power is not only over physical infirmity, but also over mental illness. It shows us the incomparable value of human beings, whose salvation is worth every sacrifice. Seeing that their herd of swine perished violently into the sea, the swine herders and village people begged Jesus to leave because they were grieved and thought something worse would befall them. That is, they were disturbed because Jesus was interfering with their business. They were afraid that He would cut down their profits. So they asked Him to leave. Even today people don't want Christ in their life because He stirs their conscience and makes them feel guilty. To sinners Christ comes as a **"Tormentor"**. But Christ disturbs us in order to heal us; to remind us that we cannot find rest nor peace in our lives as long as other people are suffering. And if we don't repent we will also hear that frightful word, **"Go"** into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his followers; just as he did when he drove out the demons from the two demoniacs. And when we ask Jesus to leave, He leaves. He got into the boat and crossed over to Capernaum – to His own city. **(9:1)** And when He leaves we are left without light, love, hope or meaning. We live in the stench and quagmire of our sins. But to the day we die Jesus will be disturbing us in our sins through guilt, not so much to punish us, but to awaken us to His forgiving love and salvation which passes all understanding. For He is the Divine Healer of our souls.