



Parish Information Bulletin

SUNDAY 12 JULY
Osios Paisios, the Athonite

FIFTH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 8: 28-34—9:1

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY 17 JULY
St Marina, Great-Martyr

- **8.00am**
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 19 JULY

Epistle Reading: Titus 3: 8-15
Gospel Reading: Matthew 5: 14-19

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Fr Athanasios and
Fr Ephraim are available
at the Church every
Monday to Friday
between 4.00 and 6.00pm
for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

The Teachings of St. Paisios

Divine Energies are Omnipotent

...God never abandons us; we are the ones who forget and abandon Him. When man does not live spiritually, he is not entitled to divine help. But when he does live spiritually and is near God, he is entitled to it. Then if something happens and he dies, he is ready for the other life, in which case he gains both in this life and in the next.

God's help can't be obstructed, neither by men nor demons. Nothing is difficult for God or a Saint. The obstacle for us humans is our lack of faith, which prevents the great divine energies from coming to us. And while there is such a great power next to us, we, because there is such a great amount of the human element in us, cannot understand the divine energies which exceed all of the world's human powers, because they are omnipotent.

We sit for hours on end in vain, trying by ourselves to find solution to a problem, using all of our inexperience. Our head spins, our eyes burn, sleep escapes us, because the little demon has hooked us with obsessive thoughts. We may finally find a solution, but later God will find for us a better solution, which we had not thought of, leaving us with the headaches and the sleepless nights. No matter how right our thought might be, if God is not foremost, the head will tire and ache, while prayer with trust in God brings restfulness. For this reason, we can leave to God those activities which are difficult to achieve by human means and not be dependent upon our human efforts, reassured that God will do what is best.

For everything you think of doing, remember to say, "God willing"

Difficult times lie ahead

...with God's permission, a strong jolt will come our way. Difficult times lie ahead. We will be greatly tested. We have to take this warning seriously and live spiritually. It is circumstances that are forcing us and will force us in the future, to labour spiritually. But we should try to do so by choice and joyfully rather than by necessity when various sorrows come upon us. Many Saints would plead to live in our times so that they would have the chance to struggle for Christ...

A good disposition

-Geronda, what will become of the kind people who don't believe?

...Benevolent God will find a way for these kind-hearted people, either with trials and tribulations, with illnesses, hardships, with an earthquake, a lightning bolt, a deluge, or even some word, to bring them around and in the end to lead them to Paradise....

Apolytikion in the First Tone

The offspring of Farasa, and the adornment of Athos, and the imitator of the former righteous, equal in honour, O Paisios let us honour O faithful, the vessel full of graces, who hastens speedily to those who cry out: glory to Him Who gave you strength, glory to Him Who crowned you, glory to Him Who grants through you healings for all.

Thoughts are like
airplanes flying
in the air.

If you ignore them,
there is no problem.
If you pay attention
to them,
you create an
airport inside
your head
and permit them
to land!



St Paisios

“Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.” (Mt. 9:1)

This is, indeed, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, a puzzling reference, for which city or town could be considered “His own” when only a few verses earlier He himself said that “foxes have dens, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20)?

So, He comes “to his own town,” yet, we are reminded of the Prologue of the Gospel of St John when so succinctly affirmed that “he came to that which was his own, but his own did not received him” (Jn. 1:11). So, even if He is not received—and the Gergesenes end up doing precisely this—He comes nevertheless to that which, in one sense, is His own, for everything that was made was made through Him and for His sake, and yet, in another sense, it is not His own, namely, this place, our world, which God formed in its creation, man deformed in his Fall, and Christ came to transform.

Thus, when we read in today’s passage that “Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town” we are given to understand that the place where the encounter of our Lord and the two possessed men was, by implication, not his own. Matthew names it as “the land of Geresenes” (or Gergesenes, as other manuscripts have it). I believe that this land of Geresenes is a metaphor for our world and for our condition in the world.

For notice, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that about this land the evangelist gives only two indications, only two images through which one can think of it: tombs and pigs. The two men our Lord encounters in this land “came from the tombs” (8:28). We wonder if there is anything else other than tombs in this allegorical land that is ruled by death. Two other indications bespeak of the unusual location of the land: that is situated “εἰς τὸ πέρας” (8:28), as the Greek original has it, that is, at the utmost end, and that, on account of the two possessed men, “one could not pass that way” (8:29), that is, the land itself is not only “at the end,” but is itself a “dead-end,” an impasse from which one can have no escape, where there is “no exit”. These are appropriate pointers to the true character of the land of Geresenes, that is, of a land defined by the inescapability of one’s mortality.

The second image, that of the herd of the swine to which the evil spirits will soon flee, reminds us of that distant land from the parable of the Prodigal Son. There too the only living creature that was mentioned was pigs—the pigs which had their husks while the son who had abandoned his paternal house was going hungry. The pigs, on the other hand, in the land of Geresenes do not eat or live much, for as soon as they are mentioned they become associated with death, for “the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water” (8:32).

In that strange land demarcated by tombs and pigs, Christ encounters humanity as it is represented by the two possessed men—for all humanity in its state of separation from God can be understood, in one way or another, as possessed.

The evangelist gives us the dialogue that took place during that brief encounter:

“What do you want with us, Son of God?” [the possessed men] shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (8:29)

The first startling element in this exchange, my dear brothers and sisters, is the confession/profession of Christ’s divinity by the two demoniacs: “Son of God.” Only a few days ago, on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul we read again in the Gospel of St Matthew how it was precisely this same confession that made Peter the rock upon which Christ was to build His Church and it was this very confession that merited the extraordinary honour of giving to Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” so whatever he binds on earth is bound in heaven and whatever he looses on earth is loosed in heaven (Mt. 16:17-19).

How is it possible that the two possessed men and the chief of the Apostles share the same profession of faith? And how is it possible that this recognition of Christ’s divinity is for the one the reason of his blessings (“blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah...”), while for the others the cause of their damnation?

It is at this point and by positing precisely this question that the crucial difference between faith and knowledge can be illuminated. Christ’s divinity, His identity as the “Son of God” is for the possessed a matter of knowledge: they, indeed, know that, and one could argue that as far as such knowledge is concerned it surpasses in certitude that of any believer, even that of Peter, whose profession of faith was not the affirmation of a matter-of-fact statement (“you are the Messiah, the Son of God”) but precisely a profession of faith, that is, a belief that he held to be true and to which he saw himself bound with the promise of salvation (“you are the Messiah”). On the other hand, the possessed men’s knowledge not only does not imply any relationship but, on the contrary, it excludes it in the most emphatic way: “What do you want with us?” “What is it between us and you?” Yes, for them too, Christ is the Son of God, but this fact, as fact and nothing more but a mere fact, is something indifferent to them. While Peter’s confession—and after Peter, for each one of us—who Christ is makes the whole difference.

And yet, within the realm of indifference the possibility of at least one relationship is foreshadowed even for the demoniacs: “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” What for Peter was a blessing, that very same thing is here for the possessed men the cause of their suffering. Christ Himself, Christ’s presence, His parousia is also what we usually refer to as “the last judgment,” which, in many senses, goes on continuously and therefore it is not “last” but in the sense of an ultimate judgment. Christ will judge the world—and the “prince of the world”—not by appealing to the violations of the Law or by taking into account the transgressions of any moral system, but He will judge the world by revealing Himself and by doing so, revealing at the same time our attitude toward Him. The very event of His parousia will be perceived either as the fulfillment of our expectations and thus as the highest blessing or, alternatively, as an unbearable and most painful experience—the torture of which the possessed men spoke and which is, it should now be understood, only a self-torture and for that reason inescapable, for not even God can save me from myself.

The event—the criterion—is one and the same in either case: Christ, the Son of God. The experience of that reality is, however, dramatically different depending on whose experience it is. I hope that for all of us it will be the culmination of our hopes, the fulfillment of our desires, a pleasure that, as has been promised, will have no end. Amen.

-Very Rev. Panteleimon Manoussakis, Ph.D. , OMHKSEA