

Homily for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

By Father Deacon Filip

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God.

In today's Gospel, the Apostle Matthew writes about the casting out of demons from two possessed men, how they entered into a herd of swine and the suicide of those swine.

The first thing that is remarkable is that the Gergesenes owned swine, which was in contradiction to the strict Jewish Laws. Jews did not and still do not eat pork. But this was not without reason.

These swine were not kept for the benefit of the Jews but for the Greek population of the Decapolis. The Decapolis was a group of ten cities on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire in the south-eastern Levant. This area was mainly populated with people of Greek descent who did eat pork.

The swineherds, although not Greek, were raising swine for profit and thus still disobeying the Mosaic Law. That is why we read at the end of today's Gospel that the swineherds besought Christ to leave their area, virtually chasing the Son of God away.

But let us first go back to the two demoniacs, the men possessed by the devil. They lived in the tombs, because they were spiritually dead. They were violent, alien to the notion of peace. They were "exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way".

But, let us not forget that devils are believers too. We know that devils are bodiless, spiritual beings; fallen angels. We should also remember that there are many sorts of spirituality, one of which is the spirituality of the demons. Unlike men, who are made foolish because they are deluded by bodily, material things, the devils see reality as it really is, they see the spiritual basis of all things.

That is why they confess Christ as He really is: as the "Son of God". They have no illusions that Christ may only be some man, albeit a prophet, or a mere man though of great intelligence or giftedness.

No, He is the Son of God and that is clear to them. According to one Father of the Church, St Simeon the New Theologian, the devils lack only one thing: Love. Indeed, according to St Simeon: 'theology without love is the theology of the demons'.

Therefore we learn that Love is the abiding characteristic of God.

We also see today that animals are sometimes better than men. The two demoniacs survived among the tombs, but as soon as Jesus casts them out into the swine, the swine could not stand this and immediately committed suicide by throwing themselves into the

sea and drown. They cannot bear the presence of evil within them. Yet very often we hear that some people have 'behaved like animals'.

This is often untrue and unjust. Animals, for example, do not normally kill their own species. Animals are sensitive to the presence of evil, and fear the presence of supernatural demons, running away from them. This is because animals, which have no eternal, immortal souls, belong to the natural world and fear the supernatural.

Men, on the other hand, belong partly to that natural, material, bodily world, but also partly to the spiritual world. They are therefore subject to the influence of spirits, whether this is the spirit of God from the angelic world, or the spirits of Evil, from Satan.

We therefore learn that we are all subject to spiritual influences, to the spirit of evil or to the spirit of good.

The two demoniacs were cured and the swineherds were a witness to this, so they went running into their city and told the people what had happened. As Saint Matthew relates, the whole city poured out and came to see this miracle. And what did they see?

They saw the sick, mad and afflicted men sitting calmly at Christ's feet. Did those city people praise God or thank Jesus the miraculous healer?

Oh no! Instead they asked Him to leave their region. They were frightened and they did not want to listen to His words. This miracle had left them shocked and terrified.

The people of the Gergesenes suffered a great tragedy on this day. The Lord came to them and they rejected Him. They were afraid of Him.

They were witnesses to a great miracle. But they did not see it that way. The only thing they saw was their pigs being killed, their way of commerce being destroyed. They were afraid. They were angry. They were confused. So they asked Him, Our Lord and God, to go away. And this, He did.

And for them the next day was just the same as the previous day. The sun rose, they ate, they drank. They eventually got more pigs and they forgot about that terrible, frightening occurrence that happened so many years ago to them.

But what they did not understand was that God had come to them. God had visited them and they had rejected Him.

Brothers and sisters, God visits us every day. These are not just idle, empty words. It is the truth.

What we really should be doing every day is the following. We should be answering this following question: What are we going to do with what God does for us?

It does not matter whether we go out to meet Him in our mind, absolutely consciously, or not, we are going to see Christ, and we are going to ask Him to either stay or leave. And you know what: He will stay or He will leave.

Unfortunately for us, many do as the Gergesenes did, and will ask Him to leave. Why? Because we do not want to respond, when the Lord knocks at our hearts. We just brush it aside, thinking something to the effect of “leave us alone.”

For souls without faith, a miracle is not strengthening; on the contrary, it is frightening and destructive. As the Gergesenes we still do not want to know, we still turn away: “Get away from us! Don’t bother us! Don’t bother our souls and dreams!”

This Gospel is one of the most tragic of any and all of Scriptures because it really, in a nutshell, shows how people’s lives are lost.

They’re lost because people just want to live their lives. They do not want to think of God. They just want to do what they want. And then, they die.

The really sad bit is that most of them will not know and will never know what they have missed, until the Day of Judgment. This is a terrible tragedy. This is an unseen tragedy. This is an invisible tragedy.

But it is not too late. We can all open our hearts and let God enter our hearts. But this is up to us. God is waiting, and when you will be ready, He will be ready.

AMEN.