Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Luke

Father Filip Lommaert Sunday, October 25, 2026

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

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's Gospel, the Evangelist Luke tells us how our Lord Jesus Christ healed a man possessed by demons, how the demons were permitted to enter a herd of swine, and how the swine rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. It is a dramatic story, but behind the drama is a searching question for each of us. When God visits us, how do we receive Him?

Let us begin with a detail that is easy to miss. The Gadarenes were keeping swine, which the Law forbade the Jews to do, and pork is still prohibited to observant Jews today. Why, then, were there pigs here at all? The region belonged to the Decapolis, a league of ten cities on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, populated largely by Greek pagans who ate pork. Some of the local Jews had found a market there, and they raised swine for profit, setting aside the Law of Moses because there was money to be made.

This explains the end of the story. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they did not rejoice that a man was free. They counted the cost, and they begged Christ to leave. They would rather have their pigs than the Son of God in their midst. We should not be too quick to condemn them, for how often do we set aside the commandments of God when they become inconvenient to our comfort, our career, or our income?

Now let us turn to the man himself. He lived among the tombs, because his soul was already dead. He was violent and a stranger to peace, and no chain or guard could heal him. Here we notice something striking. The demons recognize Christ immediately and the man cried out: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beseech you, do not torment me." The demons are fallen angels, bodiless spiritual beings, and they see reality without illusion. We are often deceived by what is material and visible, but they are not. They do not mistake Christ for a prophet or a gifted teacher. They know exactly who He is.

What, then, do they lack? Saint Symeon the New Theologian answers in one searing phrase: they lack love, and theology without love is the theology of demons. Saint Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on this very passage, observes that the unclean spirits confess the Lord's divinity, yet their confession springs from terror and not from love. They know Him as a judge to be feared, not as a Saviour to be embraced. Let us take this to heart.

It is possible to know the correct doctrines, to quote the Fathers, to argue about the Creed, and still to be as far from God as the demons are. Orthodoxy is not only a matter of right belief. It is a life of love, because God Himself is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God.

Some of you may shudder at what I am about to say, but I say it out of love for you. In a certain sense, many of us are possessed. We are not possessed in the dramatic way of the man among the tombs. We are possessed by ourselves. Look at the world around us. Everything is arranged around the self: my needs, my rights, my pleasure, my success. We hear constantly that people have lost the ability to relate to one another, and this is no surprise. If I care only for myself, I have no need of anyone else.

Our age has made a god of instant gratification, and the "I" sits on the throne where Christ should be. Saint John Chrysostom, preaching on the words of the Apostle Paul, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour," taught that the heart of perfect Christianity is the seeking of the common good, and that nothing makes a person more like Christ than caring for his neighbours.

Sadly, this is not only found outside the Church. Some of us come to church every Sunday. We pray, we confess, we ask forgiveness. Then we walk out of the doors and return, unchanged, to the same selfishness and with the same indifference to our neighbours. It is as though confession were a way of wiping the slate clean so that we can begin the same old ways on Monday morning. We tell ourselves that church is only a couple of hours a week, and that the rest of life is our own. Beloved, this is not the life of an Orthodox Christian.

Our faith is meant to shape every hour of every day, our homes, our work, our words, and our treatment of the people God places before us. I invite you, and I include myself, to sit down in silence this week and ask honestly: can I really call myself an Orthodox Christian when I live as I do? I ask this not to condemn anyone, but because the Lord wants us to be healed.

There is an unexpected lesson in the swine. When the demons entered them, they could not bear it, and they rushed into the water and died. Animals are sensitive to the presence of evil, for they belong wholly to the natural world and recoil from what is beyond it. We are different. We are made of both body and spirit, which means we are open to spiritual influences from both directions: the Holy Spirit and the angels of light, or the spirit of evil and the powers of darkness.

We are not neutral, and we are not left without help. But we are always being invited, and we must choose what we listen to, what we allow into our hearts, and whom we follow.

Now let us return to the end of the story, which is the most sorrowful part. The swineherds ran into the city, and the people came out to see for themselves. They found the man who had terrified the whole region, once wild and chained and naked, sitting calmly at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. We would expect them to fall on their knees and thank the Healer. Instead, Saint Luke tells us, they were seized with great fear, and they asked Jesus to depart from them.

God Himself had come to the Gadarenes, and they sent Him away. They saw only that their pigs were gone and their livelihood destroyed. And He did leave.

The next day was much like the day before. The sun rose, they woke up, they ate and drank and worked. In time they replaced their herds, and the memory of that strange day faded. But God had visited them, and they had refused Him.

Brothers and sisters, this is not only their story. God visits us every day. He comes in the quiet prompting of conscience, in the person who needs our help, in the Scriptures, in the Divine Liturgy, in a moment of unexpected sorrow or unexpected grace. Every day we must answer one question: what shall I do with what God is doing for me?

The Lord does not force Himself on anyone. If we go out to meet Him with our minds, our hearts, and our will, we will find Him, and He will remain with us. If we say, "Leave us alone," He will leave. Too often we answer as the Gadarenes did. When the Lord knocks at the door of our hearts, we brush Him aside. "Not now. Don't disturb my plans. Don't touch my dreams." To a soul without faith, a miracle brings not comfort but fear, because it threatens the little kingdom we have built for ourselves.

Yet there is hope in this Gospel. The healed man begged to stay with Jesus, but Christ sent him home with a commission: "Return to your own home and declare how much God has done for you." And he went and proclaimed throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. This man shows us the right answer. He received the Lord with joy, and then he became a witness.

Each of us has been given the same invitation. We have been washed in baptism, anointed with chrismation, and fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. Do people see in our patience, mercy, and love how much God has done for us?

This Gospel is one of the saddest in all of Scripture, because it shows in a single scene how a human life can be lost. It is lost not through some spectacular crime, but quietly, by living for ourselves, never thinking of God, doing as we please, and one day dying. Many will not know what they have missed until they stand before the dread judgment seat of Christ. What a tragedy that would be!

But we are not there yet. Today is a day of mercy. The Lord is still passing by, and He is still knocking at the door. Let us not ask Him to depart. Let us fall at His feet, as the healed man did, and pray, "Stay with us, Lord, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent." Let us give Him not only our Sundays but our whole lives.

To Him be glory, honour, and worship, together with His Father without beginning and His All-Holy, Good, and Life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.