

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this week's Gospel we witness a great miracle: the healing of two demoniacs who lived among the tombs of the Gergesenes. These poor possessed people, St. Matthew tells us, were *"...so fierce that no one would pass that way" (Matthew 8:28).* The story of the miracle is well-known: *"Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. The demons begged [Jesus], 'If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.' And he said to them, 'Go!' So they came out and entered the swine; and suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and perished in the water" (Matthew 8:30).* Today, let us focus on a particular detail: how even the demons recognize that Jesus is Lord.

"...they shouted, 'What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?'" (Matthew 8:29) There is a special irony that these evil beings show Jesus more honor than the townspeople after He performs the miracle: *"Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood" (Matthew 8:34).*

In this week's Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul: *"Brethren, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2).*

The townspeople are so focused on protecting the desires of their day-to-day lives, that rather than rejoicing at Christ lifting the burden of their neighbors, they fear Christ instead. Are we like them, or can we say that we truly live a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness? Do we both live and walk by the spirit that treats our neighbors with compassion and with understanding?

My prayer is that the messages of both the Gospel & the Epistle will strengthen our relationship to the Lord, so that, as the passage ends, we will not be the townspeople; instead, we will be with Him as He gets into the boat, crosses over, and comes into His own city *(Matthew 9:1)*.

+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta