

## **Image of a True Disciple: The Gadarene Demoniac- By Fr. Steven Kostoff**

One of the most challenging narratives in the Gospels is the healing of the Gadarene demoniac [Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39]. This dramatic event, which reveals the power of Christ over the demons, will appear to the 21st century mind as either archaic or even primitive. We may listen with respect and sing “Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee!” upon the completion of the reading, but “wrapping our minds” around such a narrative may leave us baffled, if not shaking our heads. The spectacle of a man possessed by many demons, homeless and naked, living among the tombs, chained so as to contain his self-destructive behavior, is not exactly a sight that we encounter with any regularity, to state the obvious. (Although we should acknowledge that behind the walls of certain institutions, we could witness to this day some horrible scenes of irrational and frightening behavior from profoundly troubled and suffering human beings). Add to this a herd of swine blindly rushing over a steep bank and into a lake to be drowned, and we must further recognize the strangeness of this event. This is altogether not a part of our world!

Yet, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of the narrated event, which does appear in three of the Gospels, though with different emphases and details—in fact there are two demoniacs in Saint Matthew’s telling of the story! It is always instructive to compare the written account of a particular event or body of teaching when found in more than one Gospel. This will cure us of the illusion of a wooden literalism as we will discover how the four evangelists will present their gathered material from the ministry of Jesus in somewhat different forms. As to the Gadarene demoniac, here was an event within the ministry of Christ that must have left a very strong impression upon the early Church as it was shaping its oral traditions into written traditions that would eventually come together in the canonical Gospels. This event was a powerful confirmation of the Lord’s encounter and conflict with, and victory over, the “evil one.” The final and ultimate consequence of that victory will be revealed in the Cross and Resurrection.

Whatever our immediate reaction to this passage, I believe that we can recognize behind the dramatic details the disintegration of a human personality under the influence of the evil one, and the reintegration of the same man’s personhood when healed by Christ. Here was a man that was losing his identity to a process that was undermining the integrity of his humanity and leading to physical harm and psychic fragmentation. I am not in the process of offering a psychological analysis of the Gadarene demoniac because I am ill-equipped to do so and I do not believe that we can “reduce” his horrible

condition to psychological analysis. We are dealing with the mysterious presence of personified evil and the horrific effects of that demonic presence which we accept as an essential element of the authentic Gospel Tradition. The final detail that indicates this possessed man’s loss of personhood is revealed in the dialogue between himself and Jesus.

“Jesus then asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion,’ for many demons had entered him” [8:30].

To be named in the Bible is to receive a definite and irreducible identity as a person. It is to be “someone” created in the “image and likeness of God.” It is the role of the evil one to be a force of disintegration. The “legion” inhabiting the man reveals the loss of his uniqueness and the fragmentation of his personality. Such a distorted personality can no longer have a “home,” which is indicative of our relational capacity as human beings, as it is indicative of stability and a “groundedness” in everyday reality. The poor man is driven into the desert, biblically the abode of demons. Once again, we may stress the dramatic quality of this presentation of a person driven to such a state, but would we argue against this very presentation as false when we think of the level of distortion that accompanies any form of an “alliance” with evil—whether “voluntary or involuntary?” Does anyone remain whole and well-balanced under the influence of evil? Or do we rather not experience or witness a drift toward the “abyss”?

Then we hear a splendid description of the man when he is healed by Christ! For we hear the following once the demons left him and entered into the herd of swine and self-destructed (the ultimate end of all personal manifestations of evil?).

“Then the people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid” [8:35].

“Sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.” This is clearly one of the most beautiful descriptions of a Christian who remains as a true disciple of the Master. This is the baptized person who is clothed in a “garment of salvation” and who is reoriented toward Christ, the “Sun of Righteousness.” The image here is of total reintegration, of the establishment of a relationship with Christ that restores integrity and wholeness to human life. It is also an image of peacefulness and contentment. Our goal is life is to “get our mind right,” which describes repentance or that “change of mind” that heals all internal divisions of the mind and heart as it restores our relationship with others. Jesus commands the man “to return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you” [8:39]. We, too, have been freed from the evil one “and all his angels and all his pride” in baptism. In our own way, perhaps we too can also proclaim just how much Jesus has done for us [cf. 8:39].

## **Martyr Galaction and his wife at Emesa** **Commemorated on [November 5](#)**

There was a rich and distinguished couple named Kleophon and Leukippe, who lived in the Syrian city of Emesa, and for a long time they were childless. They gave much gold to the pagan priests, but still they remained childless.

The city of Emesa was governed by a Syrian named Secundus, put there by the Roman Caesars. He was a merciless and zealous persecutor of Christians, and to intimidate them he ordered that the instruments of torture be displayed on the streets. The slightest suspicion of belonging to “the sect of the Galilean” (as thus Christians were called by the pagans), was enough to get a man arrested and handed over for torture. In spite of this, many Christians voluntarily surrendered themselves into the hands of the executioners, in their desire to suffer for Christ.

A certain old man by the name of Onuphrius, concealed his monastic and priestly dignity beneath his beggar’s rags. He walked from house to house in Emesa, begging alms. At the same time, whenever he saw the possibility of turning people away from the pagan error, he preached about Christ.

Once, he came to the magnificent house of Leukippe. Accepting alms from her, he sensed that the woman was in sorrow, and he asked what was the cause of this sadness. She told the Elder about her familial misfortune. In consoling her, Onuphrius began to tell her about the one true God, about His omnipotence and mercy, and how He always grants the prayer of those turning to Him with faith. Hope filled the soul of Leukippe. She believed and accepted Holy Baptism. Soon after this it was revealed to her in a dream that she would give birth to a son, who would be a true follower of Christ. At first, Leukippe concealed her delight from her husband, but after the infant was born, she revealed the secret to her husband and also persuaded him to be baptized.

They named the baby Galaction and his parents raised him in the Christian Faith and provided him a fine education. He could make an illustrious career for himself, but Galaction sought rather an unsullied monastic life in solitude and prayer.

When Galaction turned twenty-four, his father resolved to marry him off and they found him a bride, a beautiful and illustrious girl by the name of Episteme. The son did not oppose the will of his father, but by the will of God, the wedding was postponed for a time. Visiting his betrothed, Galaction gradually revealed his faith to her. Eventually, he converted her to Christ and he secretly baptized her himself.

Besides Episteme he baptized also one of her servants, Eutolmius. The newly-illuminated decided on the initiative of Galaction, to devote themselves to the monastic life. Leaving the city, they hid themselves away on Mount Publion, where there were two monasteries, one for men and the other for women. The new monastics had to take with them all the necessities for physical toil, since the inhabitants of both monasteries were both old and infirm.

For several years the monastics struggled in work, fasting and prayer. Once, Episteme had a vision in her sleep: she and Galaction stood in a wondrous palace before a radiant King, and the King bestowed golden crowns on them. This was a prefiguring of their impending martyrdom.

The pagans became aware of the existence of the monasteries, and a military detachment was sent to apprehend their inhabitants. But the monks and the nuns succeeded in hiding themselves in the hills. Galaction, however, had no desire to flee and so he remained in his cell, reading Holy Scripture. When Episteme saw that the soldiers were leading Galaction away in chains, she began to implore the Abbess to permit her to go also, since she wanted to accept torture for Christ together with her fiancé and teacher. The Abbess tearfully blessed Episteme to do so.

The saints endured terrible torments, while supplicating and glorifying Christ. Their hands and legs were cut off, their tongues were cut out, and then they were beheaded.

Eutolmius, the former servant of Episteme, and who had become her brother in Christ and fellow ascetic in monastic struggles, secretly buried the bodies of the holy martyrs. He later wrote an account of their virtuous life and their glorious martyrdom, for his contemporaries and for posterity.

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### **NOVEMBER / DECEMBER COFFEE HOUR SCHEDULE**

Nov. 05: Irene  
Nov. 12: Fred & Terri  
Nov. 19: Joe Rose  
Nov. 26: Basil & Tim  
Dec. 03: Open  
Dec. 10: Open  
Dec. 17: Open  
Dec. 24: Open  
Dec. 31: All day Social @ Rectory sponsored by Fr Andrew  
(Please RSVP by 12-1)

*During the Nativity Fast:*

*From Nov. 19- Dec 24<sup>th</sup> there will be no meat products served.*