

THE HEALING OF THE POSSESSED MAN

—by Basil bishop of Seleucia—

Many and various are the demons' plots against humans. However, the help God provides to humans is incomparably greater. Indeed! If God did not defend us with His divine protection, the entire human race would have ceased to exist a long time ago due to the demons' onslaughts. Truly! When have the demons ever allowed an opportunity to pass without creating temptations for man? When did they ever pause preparing traps for human beings or planning calamities for us?

Of course, the devil is not evil by nature, but he chose to incline toward wickedness. The Creator had appointed him to rule over the air, as St. Paul, the beholder of heavenly mysteries revealed to us: **“According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2)**. However, when he desired to rise above his appointed position, and, when he subsequently lost his honorary distinction and was displaced from his throne on account of his high-minded arrogance, he turned his malice toward human beings, in order to manifest his vengefulness toward the Creator. Since he was unable to strike back at God directly, he devised a different plan of attack: he decided to instruct God's creations to revolt against Him. Thus, as soon as the first man was created in the image of the Creator, the devil advised him to oppose God: **“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will become gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5)**. In following, when the human race began to multiply, he imparted thoughts of idolatry to man, who became so darkened that he began to worship the creation instead of the Creator. However, the demons were not content with deceiving humans in this way or even with receiving worship from them. They proceeded to harm and forcefully take up residence within people.

Even so, God did not leave his creature helpless. He ceaselessly used various methods to heal man, and ultimately set in motion His wise plan of Dispensation in Christ to trigger the downfall of the demons. This is clearly seen in the Gospel, where Christ censures the oppression of the demons and makes manifest God's help to people. **“And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house, but in the tombs” (Lk. 8:27)**. This is the hostility the demons have toward humans. They desire to destroy everyone, but they are deeply distressed since they cannot harm everyone.

“And when Jesus had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones” (Mk. 5:2-5).

Even though the devil had bound this person with so many afflictions, he was unable to prevent him from meeting up with the Lord. The demons, unable to endure the brilliance of Him Who was standing before them, cried out, **“What have we to do with You, Jesus?” (Mt. 8:29)**. They react in the presence of the person who is visible to them, not knowing that God is concealed within this body. Otherwise, how could a slave yell to his Master, **“What have I to do with You?”** They belittle the person whom they see because they do not see Him Who scourges them.

“What do we have to do with You?” asked the demons. **“We have encountered many righteous men, but we have never experienced such a lashing from them! ‘What do we have to do with You?’** From the moment You came to the earth, You proclaimed war against us. When You were born, the Magi came to see You, they worshipped You, and they broke away from us. The tax collectors heard You preaching, and they fled from our own toll booths. You ensnared our prey, the harlots, with repentance. Our only consolation remaining was human suffering, but You also deprived us of this enjoyment. You made paralyzed people stand on their feet; You granted hearing to deaf people; You bestowed light to the blind; You freed the dead from their graves. Every time You healed someone, You simultaneously punished us.”

“What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God?” They called Him the Son of God; however, they did not realize that the Son is God [Himself]. Because people who have drawn near to God through their great virtue are also referred to as “sons of God.” It is with this meaning that God states, **“Israel is My firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22)**. And elsewhere, **“I said, ‘you are gods, and you are all sons of the Most High’” (Ps. 82:6)**. And another scriptural verse says, **“When the sons of God saw the daughters of men” (Gen. 6:2)**. In other words, this name [son of God] is not indicative of kinship with the Divinity by nature only but through affiliation as well.

The devil showed the same ignorance during the time of Christ’s baptism in the Jordan River. After he heard the voice coming from the heavens, **“This is My beloved Son” (Mt. 3:17)**, he said to Christ, **“If you are**

the Son of God, throw Yourself down” (Mt. 4:6). If the devil had known that he was speaking to God, he would not have attempted to scare Him by ordering Him to fall down [from the roof of the Temple]; because for God there is no height or depth.

St. Mark the Evangelist relates that the demons spoke in this manner: **“What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?” (Mk. 1:24).** He does not address Christ as the Creator of man but as a citizen of Nazareth. “Since you are a visible being,” says the devil, “you should act accordingly. We see a human, but we feel as if we are being expelled by God. The lashes we are receiving do not seem to be coming from an inhabitant of Nazareth but rather from someone who has descended from Heaven. Reveal to us your nature through your works.”

“What have we to do with You, Jesus, Son of God?” (Mt. 8:29). What are you saying, O devil? You have the audacity to question, **“You have come now?”** Him Who created time and appointed the day of Judgment? Alas! The devil is unaware that He Who has come is the eternal God, Who confirms His arrival in the form of a servant. He is unaware that the Lord and God of all is wearing the [human] cloak, which he received from David. The devil belittles Christ based on what he sees, but he is simultaneously invisibly thrashed by the power of Christ’s Divinity. This is why he rants using phrases containing both impudence and supplication. **“What have we to do with You, Jesus? I implore You, do not torment me” (Mk. 5:7).**

The demons suffer prior the Last Judgment because they are commanded to stop afflicting human beings: **“For He ordered the unclean spirit, ‘come out of the man’” (Mk. 5:8).** Furthermore, Christ the Master, desiring to demonstrate to everyone present His incomprehensible Divine Providence for people even when they are immersed in terrible suffering, asks, **“What is your name? And he [the demon] answered saying, ‘My name is Legion: for we are many’” (Mk. 5:9).** Christ did not ask because He was unaware of his name, but rather to reveal to us how many murderous demons had taken hold of the human body, and that—despite all this—they were never able to put him to death. A multitude of demons that launched an onslaught on a single person, with the intention of putting him to death, were incapable of vanquishing him.

The demons were unable to throw him over the cliffs, they were incapable of cutting him to pieces, and they failed to mutilate him using the very chains that bound him. The possessed man was able to endure the demons’ sustained barrage, protected throughout the duration of this ordeal by the hand of God. St. Luke the Evangelist details something significant and noteworthy: **“For it had taken hold of him for many years” (Lk. 8:29).** What

awesome protection! The demons felt no less torment than the person they were torturing—for they wanted to murder him for many years, but God did not allow them to fulfill their desire. Things remained this way until the moment Christ the King decided to arrive and grant freedom to this person who had suffered so much.

“Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He may permit them to enter the swine. And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned” (Lk. 8:32-33). Why do you permit the demons to do this, O Lord? You are aware of their malice and wickedness. Why then did You consent to their request? He did this, dear reader, in order for us to learn that the demons are weaker than even pigs, when God stands in their way. Moreover, Christ wants to point out to us that the demons rejoice with the demise of human beings, and that they celebrate when they see us suffering. Indeed, they have no sympathy at all for human beings. For, if they exhibited such malice even for the swine, what would they proceed to do to humans, if God permitted them?

If we consider all the above, we will perceive the demons' hostility, we will be prompted to despise enmity and malice, and we will want to avoid carrying out the advice of the demons, who cause us unbearable distress and suffering.

This Gospel passage also reveals to us God's care and concern for human beings. Indeed, everything would have been annihilated in a moment and no person would have been left standing; everyone would have been devoured by the demons' fury, if it weren't for the protection of God's invisible and invincible hand. He allowed the swine to be harmed in order for us to comprehend His providence for man.

Therefore, let us confess and proclaim God's divine providence, which we all experience and enjoy. Let us thank Him for His help, which preserves us. Let us acknowledge and declare that God's assistance is what safeguards us. Let us ceaselessly keep sight of God's help and always exclaim, **“You, O Lord, are our helper and protector!”**