

10th Sunday of Matthew (Metropolitan Dionysios of Serbia and Kozani)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



‘And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” And Jesus answered, “Faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting” As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed’.

It is clear from the Gospel reading that the boy’s illness was not of the body but of the spirit and that this had repercussions on his bodily health. It wasn’t epilepsy but demonic possession. His father called him a ‘lunatic’ [i.e. ‘under the influence of the moon’], but the Evangelist writes that a demon departed from him. He wanted to say that the illness wasn’t what people often call lunacy, but an attack from the evil spirit. This is confirmed by Christ’s own words when he says that this kind[of demon] cannot be expelled except through prayer and fasting.



The boy's father believed that his son had a bodily sickness, but the Gospel confirms that it was more than this. It may be that when Christ said: 'Faithless and perverse generation', it was this erroneous view that He was condemning. God really is saddened when people are deliberately obtuse, when they don't want to see what's actually happening to them. In another instance in the Gospels, it says that Christ grieved for the Pharisees 'for the hardness of their heart' [Mk. 3, 5]. This is the disbelief and perfidy which really saddens God: 'Faithless and perverse generation'.

I fear, however, that our own generation may be the same. Perhaps we don't want to recognize the extent of the evil which is afflicting us and thus deliberately deceive ourselves. Despite the fact that we don't believe in God, that we're all superstitious and gullible, we still deny the existence of the spirit of evil and we attribute whatever happens to us to natural causes. We think it beneath us to consider that we might be in thrall to the evil one, that we might be more ill than we want to believe, or that our cure doesn't depend on human intervention but on God Himself. The times in which we live are so critical and our experiences so tragic that we won't be saved unless God intervenes for us.

Many of those who hear these words will think they're exaggerated, without

foundation and foolish; that we're in no danger; that everything will turn out fine, so long as we believe in ourselves. All that means is that we aren't aware of the nature of our sickness, nor do we know the identity of the Healer Who can cure us. We're more ill than we know and this sickness isn't of the body but of the spirit. As Scripture tells us 'the whole world lies under the power of the evil one', [1 Jn. 5, 19].

It's a bold and brave person who would talk today about demonic influence on thoughts and in the heart. People aren't willing to take such talk seriously, when they're dubious even when they hear about God. Our hearts and minds have been made arid by unbelief. People today have cast God out of their lives and, in His stead, have placed themselves. It may, in fact, not be too much to wonder whether the age in which we live is the era of apostasy concerning which Saint Paul writes in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians.

At that time, the lawless one will be revealed, the son of perdition. 'He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God'. So, is this time the era in which we live? Because people have certainly rebelled and have become insolent towards God, and are working to destroy everything that has so far been considered holy and sacred. They've put themselves in God's place and demand to be recognized as gods. Within such a climate, when even talking about God is difficult, it's harder still to speak about the spirit of deceit, about demonic influence on our thoughts and heart.

But this, too, is a ploy on the part of the evil one: to put into our minds the idea that he doesn't exist and that any talk of him is to be considered outmoded and laughable*. But we can't get round the fact that the whole of Scripture talks about the spirit of evil who deceives 'the whole world'. If what I'm saying now were simply my own words, I wouldn't expect anybody to set any great store by it, but it isn't; it's the word of God, Holy Scripture.

Just as Scripture talks about God and people, so it also speaks about the evil one. Not as a second god, the god of evil, but as an archangel who fell from heaven and 'at an opportune time' [Lk. 4, 13] opposed himself to the work of God, which is for our salvation. Without the devil- not as the personification of evil, but as a personal, spiritual being- the fall, the incarnation and the whole mystery of the divine dispensation are inexplicable.

Today's sermon seems pessimistic. But it's something which the Church should be preaching, with a sense of responsibility. When the disciples reported to Him that they were unable to expel the evil spirit from the sick boy, Jesus Christ said: '...this

kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting'. Who's going to say this, who's going to preach this in the modern world? In a world that doesn't hunger and thirst after righteousness, a world which 'is perishing with hunger' in the midst of a surfeit of material goods.

In the face of the grave dangers which are threatening us and the failure of all human means to provide us with better days and a way of being saved, all that remains is to listen to the preaching of the Church, which constantly calls us to repentance. We're not saved by either our wisdom or our strength, because we're sick not in the body but in the spirit. So let us pray, let us fast; in brief, let us repent. Amen.

Source: *Επί πτερύγων ανέμων, pp. 184-8*

***The nineteenth century French poet Charles Baudelaire wrote that 'the devil's best trick is to persuade you that he doesn't exist'. Similarly, readers familiar with the work of C. S. Lewis will be aware of this quotation from the Screwtape Letters: 'There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them' [WJL].**