

## Thy Kingdom Come

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**Gospel:** Matthew 8:28-9:1: *And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.*

"Art thou come hither  
to torment us before the time?"

Baudelaire, the French poet, said that the biggest deception of the devil is that he makes us believe in his nonexistence."

Many Christians consider the devil as a pietistic invention for the believers who want to personify evil, thus justifying their human passions. According to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the devil is a living and an existing person. In today's Gospel passage, we heard him talking to Christ and arguing with Him...

The devil was an angel. His pride and his will to establish a kingdom over God's kingdom and to become a King changed him from being the brightest to being the darkest angel. He turned from being the angel of light to an evil and deceiving spirit.

God allowed the devil to work before He judges him in the last Judgement. God allowed this because He thought this would benefit man and lead him to spiritual perfection. A struggle exists between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil, even though the end is known. The devil knows that at the end he is a loser, but he is "as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8), as long as there is time. For this reason, after the Lord cast them from the two demoniacs, the devils said, "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" The Incarnation, works, and miracles of Christ, His founding of the Church and Her sacraments, and the overflowing of the grace of the Holy Spirit constitute for the devil a defeat before the last judgement. All these make the devil suffer before time.

The repeated stories of exorcisms in the New Testament may seem like fairy tales. Some may interpret them in relation to the ignorance of that time about certain kind of physical diseases, especially that these appearances (daimonisme'noc) of people inhabited by devils are rare in our days.

The rarity of these appearances nowadays is not because these Gospel stories were misinterpreted at that time, but that is an indication of the powerful truth of the Incarnation, evangelism, the Church and Her sacraments. These are the powers that crushed the head of the serpent.

On the other hand, the ways of the devil have changed in time. The Book of Revelation uniquely shows the struggle between the heavenly and the earthly. The Book of Revelation says that the power of the devil is represented by two beasts, one rising from the east and the other rising from the west.

For Saint John the Theologian, the writer of this Book on the island of Patmos, the East was the eastern land, that is the eastern countries with their myths, ideologies and secret religions. It is the beast of the human mind lost in human beliefs and various philosophies... All this came and will come in the name of the freedom of man and his self-realization. But all this will lead him, and has already led him, to hidden slavery, slavery to various idolatries. It does not lead him to the freedom of the children of God.

The western beast represents the persecution front and the violation of human freedom coming from the people in authority. The West signifies the center of kingships and powers persecuting man, not in his thought, but in his existence. Here we also add to the list the dominance of powers, the violation of freedom, and economic injustice. It all comes from the philosophy of the strong imposing the law of the jungle. These eastern and western powers are able to make every person despair. But Revelation announces the victory. It is a book of hope and assurance. It says that the sacrificial lamb, the Son of God, will conquer these two beasts. We

see the beginning of this conquest in the words of the devil, "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" The Kingdom of God has begun with power.

Christ came to establish His Kingdom on earth. From the beginning of His mission, the devil tried to strike a deal with God. The devil tried to promise Jesus that, in case the latter submitted, he would give Him all the kingdoms. God forbid! The refusal of Christ in this temptation meant that Christ Himself had begun to establish a Kingdom different from that of the devil, and its ways are opposed to the devil's.

Jesus chose that the ways of His Kingdom be planted with crosses. He charged His disciples and allies to sacrifice instead of working for their self-interests, to offer themselves instead of exploiting others, and to be faithful instead of deceiving. In other words, He charged them to follow the narrow way leading to life, instead of trekking the deceiving way leading to destruction.

Seeing today's Gospel event in which the kingdom of the devil was crushed, we add to the work of Jesus the prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come!" We repeat this expression in the Lord's prayer, and by it we announce the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. Facing this event, the prayer "Thy Kingdom come" comes out of us with power, and with all its pertaining challenges and commitments. As we saw in the story, Jesus began what we, His brothers -as He called us-, ought to continue, that "His Kingdom Come!"

Amen.