

## GENERAL & SACRAMENTAL INFORMATION

**Regarding the Temple:** In our tradition, the church temple is a house of prayer. Upon entering it, please refrain from unnecessary conversation before, during and after church services, most especially during the Divine Liturgy. Prior to divine services, or during coffee hour in the Church Hall is the appropriate place to exchange personal greetings and converse with one another. May God bless your reverence and piety!

**Sick/Emergency Calls/Institutional Visitations:** are answered as requests are received. All visitations are by request. Call to schedule an appointment.

**Confessions:** Are heard one half-hour before every service at Holy Assumption, and once a month at Ss. Peter & Paul. Special arrangements by necessity, and thereby, appointment only.

**Sacraments of Illumination:** In the case of infants, Baptism, Chrismation, & Eucharist are administered on ordinary Sundays of the church year, preferably in the context of Divine Liturgy. At least one sponsor must be of the Orthodox Faith and in good sacramental standing. The newly baptized must have one name that is Biblical or Christian in its origin.

**What is Church Membership?** By regulation, active membership in the church consists not merely in the payment of a set sum, or by fulfilling a *minimum* sacramental obligation, but rather in participation in the life of the church (commensurate with your physical ability). This includes entering into the spirit of the faith through regular and frequent attendance, participation in the divine mysteries, sustained financial support (at a percentage that reflects your ability), and adherence to the parish, diocesan, and national church statutes.

**Receiving Communion:** while all are welcome to pray with us, we politely offer a reminder that the Orthodox Church maintains a closed communion. All are welcome to Antidoron bread following the Divine Liturgy, but only prepared Orthodox Christians may receive the Eucharist. Orthodox Christians do not commune in non-Orthodox churches, and the non-Orthodox are not communed in an Orthodox Church. Thank you!

**Lapsed Members:** You are always welcome home, and we need you! Generally speaking, sincere Confession, Communion, and regular attendance are all that is required to begin parish life anew! See Fr. Elijah for specific details.

**New Members/Adult Chrismation:** new members are always welcome. In the case of interested adults seeking Chrismation, a period of catechesis prescribed by the pastor is necessary before the administration of Holy Mysteries. An Orthodox sponsor is required.

**Weddings:** A minimum six-month notice is requested. Either Bride or Bride-groom must be an Orthodox Christian, and a parishioner in good standing. Dispensations may be required for inter-faith marriages (the marriage of an Orthodox & any non-Orthodox person). Banns of matrimony published 3 weeks before ceremony. No Weddings performed during fasting seasons!!!

**Burial in Church Cemetery:** Burial in consecrated ground is reserved for the Orthodox and their spouses/children. Charity burials, or odd circumstances are at the rector's discretion. It is strongly encouraged to hold viewings and visitation of the reposed in the church.

**Our Stewardship of the Church:** "Lord Jesus Christ, Thou art the good steward, who redeemed Adam and Eve of their failed stewardship by offering Thyself for the life of the world. Thou didst teach us in the feeding of the multitudes that whatever we give to God is returned to us multiplied. Thou didst praise those good and faithful servants in the parable of the talents who returned to the Master their gifts. So help us to learn the joy of stewardship, remembering that everything we have comes from Thee and belongs to Thee. We know, Lord, that we often live in fear of the future and insecurity. Help us to remember the lilies of the field and so to trust in Thy providence. Grant to us a cheerful and generous spirit. Enkindle in the hearts of all Thy people a zealous love for Thee. For Thou art the Good Steward, and to Thee we give thanks, praise and glory, together with Thy Father who is from everlasting and Thine all holy good and life-giving Spirit now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."

**Prayer When Lighting A Candle:** "Set our hearts on fire with love for Thee, O Christ our God, so that in this flame we may love Thee with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul and with all our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, so that by keeping Thy commandments we may glorify Thee, the giver of all good gifts. Amen."

# HOLY ASSUMPTION ORTHODOX CHURCH

629 Sunshine Avenue • Central City, Pa. 15926

## SS. PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

Tipple Road • Goodtown, Pa. 15530



*Very Rev. Archpriest Elijah J. Bremer, Rector*  
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**20<sup>th</sup> Sunday Post-Pentecost**  
**10 November 2024**

*"Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you."  
(Luke 16: 31)*



## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

*by: stufffromthestuff*

We often think of Jesus' ministry as one of reconciliation: He preached the forgiveness of sins and welcomed into his circle those estranged from synagogue and society at large. And, as Paul put it, we have been called to the ministry of reconciliation, following in his footsteps. But, as we know, reconciliation is hard work. Today's Gospel story, known traditionally as the Gerasene Demoniac, in addition to being a major healing story, also offers us an example from Jesus' life where reconciliation is rejected — at least at first. And I think that's work some attention today.

When Jesus and the disciples get out of their boat across the Sea of Galilee from their home country, they arrive at a broken community. Jesus is immediately greeted by "a man of the city having demons." It's an interesting descriptor, since it emphasizes that the man belongs to the community; he isn't a stranger to them, but one of their own. But, he has demons. Whether we think of this as referring to literal possession by malevolent spirits, mental illness, or something else, it's clear that he is living in a state of deep dysfunction. He is not able to remain in the city where he rightfully belongs, but lives amidst the dead in the tombs, where he is kept shackled and under guard.

The man greets Jesus, falling at his feet and shouting, "What have you to do with me? I beg you, do not torment me!" The man's response to Jesus is not to ask for healing, but to try to put distance between him. He is accustomed to his life in the tombs and not at all certain he wants to disrupt it. (As I previously noted when reflecting on Mark's version of this story, it's very human to prefer an unsatisfactory status quo over the uncertainty and effort required to change, even if that change is for the better.) But, eventually Jesus is able to cast the demons out of the man and into a herd of pigs, which subsequently runs into the sea and drowns.

What's strange is how the community responds. We don't actually get much idea of their opinions at all. The swineherds don't rush to the man's side, but instead go to spread the news to everyone in the area. But we don't know how they feel about it. Are they scandalized and rushing to spread the gossip, or are they excited and running off to spread the good news? Are they upset at losing their pigs, or is the cost of the herd worth it to them to have the man restored to them? We don't know.

We similarly don't hear much about the people of the city. They come to see for themselves, and all the text says is that, seeing the man healed, they are afraid and ask Jesus to go away. It's as though, when confronted with the miracle, they just don't want to deal with it. It's an interesting confrontation.

Jesus, for his part, doesn't criticize how they've treated the man, but he offers him back to them whole. As James Allison writes: *Jesus did not come and give the Gerasenes a lecture on the structure of their society. He didn't argue with them about definitions. He didn't propose an alternative form of legislation. He did something much more three-dimensional. He empowered the demoniac to become a human being, sitting, clothed and in his right mind, going home to his friends. (Faith Without Resentment, 133).*

And their reaction is less than enthusiastic. As the story ends, the man doesn't seem to see much place for him back in his city and asks to tag along with Jesus, but Jesus sends him back home as a lasting witness to what God had done.

The story has no resolution. Jesus leaves the area and the man he healed returns home with a good story but an uncertain welcome. Jesus has offered the community an opportunity to be healed and reconciled. Will they take it? Or, will they remain in their place of fear? We aren't told, but it doesn't look good.

There's an important lesson for us in this. God is always at work in the world, giving us healing opportunities we can either seize in faith or reject in fear. It takes a special kind of strength — a strength we call vulnerability — to open ourselves up to the risk that real change, including desired changes like reconciliation and healed communities, can involve. When faced with the work of God in our life and in our communities, how will we respond? The choice is ours.

*Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save him, the Lord shall raise him up"*

*– James, 5: 14-15*

Abp. Nathaniel Mat. Valeria Fr. Jim	Abp. Melchisedek Mat. Sasha Fr. Ray	Abp. Michael Mat. Suzanne Mat. Joanne	Fr. Michael Mat. Laryssa		
Allison	Elaine	Charles	Bernadette	Janet	Katie
Sandi	Stephanie	Sophie	Nancy	Chrystyna	Damian
Noah	Emma	Henry	Natalia	Peter	Ashley
Mary-Evelyn	Bryan	Gregory	Debbie	Nancy	Mike
Donna	Kevin	Nick	Anne	Nick	Agnes
Robert	Mary Etta	Cory	Sharon	Kara	Michelle M.
Helen	Sandy	Kenneth	Jaida	Scott	Jon
Bill	Sam	Betty	Jerry	Allan	Julie
Charles	Dakota	Kathy	Sue	Debbie	Ruth
Mary-Elizabeth	Darcel	Jennifer	Mary	Karis	Jeremiah
Lisa	Thelma	Shane	Mary Ann	Peter	Lawrence
Jonathan	Tammy	Kathie	Chris	Larry	Matthew Julie
Betty Lou	Renée	Alexandra	Roxanne	Alexis	Gordon
Izzy	James	Curtis	Lita	Suzanne	Shirley-Ruth
George	Jean	Dale	Allen	Steven	Jim
Mitch	Johnnie	Charles	Nancy	Annette	Darren
Johnnie-Mac	David	Agnes	Barbara	Katherine	Joseph
Jan	Larry	Daniel	Monica	Dwain	Michael
Magdalena	Dorothy	Francesca	Kara	Andrew	Tim
Taissia	Daniel	Barbara	Mary Ann	Dave	Ashley
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***Do you have prayer intentions? Remember you may add or remove intentions at any time. You do not have to be members of our parish, or even Orthodox to be placed on the list!***



## AWAKENING FROM DELUSION

*By: Fr. Anthony Hughes*



I do not like to talk about demons much. They are so into themselves that I don't want to cooperate in their narcissism.

Also, I accept completely the Orthodox understanding that sin, death, and the devil (along with the demons) were defeated when Jesus died on the Cross and was resurrected, so it seems a little un-Orthodox to give demons as much credit as some people do. They are not gods. They are not omnipresent, or omniscient, or omnipotent. They are creatures and sad ones at that, best not given a place of prominence because they do not have a place of prominence.

One thing about them does interest me though. That is, one of the signs of their influence is that when they are around and given a place of prominence, they tend to make people crazy. In our Gospel story this morning the demoniac is exorcized and afterward, we are told, he sits before Jesus "clothed and in his right mind."

There seems to be a connection between being in your right mind and being free of demonic influence whether it is from some actual fallen angel or simply

demonic in nature and more typical like fear, pride, possessiveness, greed, lust...you know, that kind of stuff. Being in your right mind, I think, is a sign of spiritual health just as not being in your right mind is a sign of spiritual disease.

That is why I think that perspective is so important. We need to adopt a proper understanding of God, the world, ourselves and our neighbors. The Orthodox Church insists that right belief is essential and I absolutely agree. That is, for most of us, where we must begin to change our minds from being deluded to being, as the Gospel says, "right". "Put on the mind of Christ," Paul writes. So let's do. We can't do it all in one fell swoop, but we can do it, little by little. So let's start with the Orthodox perspective on who we are.

Dan Hakim sent me a most wonderful link to a graduation speech given by George Saunders at Syracuse University. Saunders is a teacher there and an acclaimed writer of essays, short stories, novellas and children's books. It touches on the message I want to give you to take home today.

Saunders tells the students:

That luminous part of you that exists beyond personality – your soul, if you will – is as bright and shining as any that has ever been. Bright as Shakespeare's, bright as Gandhi's, bright as Mother Teresa's. Clear away everything that keeps you separate from this secret luminous place. Believe it exists, come to know it better, nurture it, share its fruits tirelessly.

In that little paragraph is the core understanding we Orthodox have about who and what you and I are. If that perspective is off, then we will not "be in our right minds." The perspective is this: we are made in God's image. The image of God is who and what we are. Nothing can take that away. Nothing can change it. We are mirrors that reflect God's glory. His glory shines in us all the time. The mirror is dirty, but it is there. It needs to be cleaned and polished.

At the core of every human being, writes St. Gregory Nazianzus, is this amazing spark of divinity, created by God, put there by God which nothing, not even sin and death and the devil, can adversely affect. Sin obscures our vision of this truth. Fear distracts us from seeing it. The traumas and pains of life keep us from touching it. All this negative stuff makes us believe wrongly that we are not the image of God, that we are separate from God, that he is far away from us and we are far away from him. But this is not true. It is impossible. The Psalmist tells us that the will of God cannot return to him without accomplishing its purpose, so the image is indestructible. It is like a seed that cannot be destroyed and it is growing and will grow forever until it reaches full fruition over and over again because there is no end to growing.

At the beginning of the spectacular movie GRAVITY a phrase pops on the screen. "Life in space is impossible." The movie is ostensibly a space movie, but it takes place in two spaces. Outer space, above our heads, and inner space inside our heads. Life in outer space is impossible, yes. There is no air, or warmth. But life lived mindlessly, without a proper perspective, in "darkness" is also impossible because without a good understanding of who we really are we will drift aimlessly and be lost in a darkness of our own making.

The answer is, as Saunders says, to "Clear away everything that keeps you separate from this secret luminous space. Believe it exists, come to know it better, nurture it, share its fruits tirelessly." I could not give better advice or say it more beautifully than that. Clear it all away through spiritual effort, through love, through compassion, through worship, and sacrament, using every tool available to awaken yourself from the delusion that God is not (right now and always) closer to us than our heartbeat, closer to us than our breath.

The demons represent all those things that support the illusion of separateness. Jesus calls Satan the "father of lies" and the greatest of these lies is that God does not love us, is not in us and around us, caring for us all the time, that there is no luminous core, no image of God in us. To be in our "right minds" means to know He does and is and we are.