

# 11-10-19 The Monkey On Our Back

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Every Sunday we read a certain section from the Gospel on that day and then they are not randomly selected, or there isn't a liturgical committee in the Orthodox Church and then they select, you know this Sunday we have to read this and that. There isn't any liturgical committee which decides which biblical part narrative should be read. There isn't anything like this. We've been reading this section on this day on almost, I wouldn't say 2000 years but since the third century or at least the third or fourth century, we've been reading this section or this narrative on this Sunday. Why? We have to ask. Because since the readings are not selected randomly or simply because the Sunday, we read this section, but it has a meaning why it is there. Now do we remember where we are in the church calendar?

There are four seasons as I mentioned before and we are in the third season, just past the third season. And there are four seasons, just past the third season means we are right in the middle of the church calendar year and in other words we are in the midst of the journey from Pascha to next Pascha in spring. When we are doing something in the middle of the job and we want to find out how far we came and how far we are going to go till we finished, we have to assess where we are and this reading allows us or helps us to assess where we are. Now, when we turn back and see how we started. Supposedly we were baptized last year at Pascha. Excuse me, Pascha this year. What is the first thing we did? Do we remember when we come to church before the baptism? What is the first thing we do at the door or in the church right before the baptism?

The liturgy of catechumen or exorcism. Now this reading today reminds us of that exorcism. Do you remember that you renounced spirits. Now, before we go into the meaning of exorcism, we have to remember why we are here. We are in our journey constantly entering into the Kingdom of God. And unfortunately, in general, the Kingdom of God is somewhere you go after you die. But in the Orthodox Church, the Kingdom of God is you enter as you live in this world, that's why God came and took flesh and lived with us so that we would be able to enter his domain. We say Kingdom of Christ, King-Dom, Dom is domain and King, who is our King? Christ our Lord. And we are invited into it. And then we heard the first calling, what was the first calling? Repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

So if you're ready, the Kingdom of heaven is ready for you. You can enter, however, it said repent. So what is this repent? You know that unfortunately there are many Christians who dumb down Christianity and said, "Oh this repentance is a repentance from sins." You know my sins; you know this and that. And then if we change our mind about it and then repent, then we can enter the Kingdom of God. Now that is the dumbed down understanding of repentance. Repentance is a total change from one stage to the other. And this from one stage to the other is the way we have been living. And we renounce that way of life and start totally new. And this newness we have to recall, and this repentance is not just repentance for our sake, but rather it's an entry into the Kingdom of God.

So, repentance for our repentance is constantly entering into the Kingdom of God therefore we need constant repentance. That's why we take confessions as often as possible. But this confession is not just a ritual or kind of rite, you go up to Father and so Father I did this and that. Not at all, actually, confession should be the place that you check how much you are changed and how much you are going to change. And as we all know, there's eternal life in us is manifested as our growth. And so

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internal Kingdom of God is not just I believe in Jesus and he invites me into his Kingdom. It just sounds romantic, but in actuality it is us receiving Christ and we change. And this change is a growth. And this maturation of humanity in us is the entry into the Kingdom of God.

And this maturing, I would say, this movement is constantly reminded in every service, every single day. Supposedly if we had the service every day, at least four times a day, we are reminded that we are entering into the Kingdom of God. Now, what are these four? First in the Vespers, there is an entrance. The priest enters into the altar with the incense and the matins and the liturgy of catechumen and the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, twice, so with the Gospel, priest enters. And then finally the gifts, priest holds the gifts and then deacons and then, enter the altar. These are the entrances. And as I mentioned formally, we cannot go right in there all together. So, on behalf of the everybody priest goes in. But the meaning is not just he takes the censor or the Gospel into the altar, but the idea is priest reminds us all that we are entering into the Kingdom of God in other words, we are maturing, we are growing into the Kingdom of God.

Now this growth, in order to start this growth, we have to get rid of whatever we had in the past. That's why we have the liturgy of catechumen or the rite of exorcism. When we hear the word exorcism, we tend to think, my goodness, what is this exorcism? This is really fascinating because we are fed with this nonsense from Hollywood, exorcism is something oh my goodness, the devil and Satan and evil spirits we get rid of and that's exorcism. That's what we do. Not at all! This is what is cultivated in the minds of the directors in Hollywood. Whenever they make something related to exorcism, a movie, they study the documents in the Middle Ages and then there are many miniatures and pictures and you find there the devil and Satan and the evil spirits.

Now so based on them, nowadays they can use CGI. So they make fantastic image of the devil, Satan and evil spirits. And when we watch them, when we are watching them we get all serious and we just gobble it up. So, when we hear exorcism, we only have these kind of infantile understanding of devil, Satan and the evil spirits. Now if you go back to the Bible and if you really read seriously the devil, the word devil is a Greek word, a slanderer, slander. Whoever or whatever slanders others is a devil and Satan is an interceptor. Whoever it is, whoever, whatever, it intercepts and runs across between God and us is Satan and the evil spirits. There are many evil spirits. Therefore, what kind of spirits did we renounce in the exorcism? Do you remember?

Well, when we want to become an Orthodox Christian, oh, I want to be Orthodox Christians and take classes in a catechism class. And then when we stand there, oh, I'm going to be an Orthodox Christian. And Father asks a question, do you renounce the spirit of such and such? And yes, sir, I do. And he asks you three times. So, what are these spirits we renounced? The first one is evil spirit. We renounce what we have nothing to do with this spirit, evil spirit. Now, evil in the Bible, it means un-useful, harmful. So, whatever is harmful and un-useful, then it is evil. So, there's nothing to do with what Hollywood presents, the evil spirit, but it's something in our life. The spirit of evil means something un-useful for us. What does that mean? Un-useful for us or harmful for us? Is to take up the image and likeness of Christ. It is harmful. It is un-useful. That's why we reject and idol worship.

The spirit of idol worship that attitude of idolizing like our parents, our children, our partner, our beloved one. When we idolize, the spirit comes back and activated in us and it fools us, and covetousness and lying, and it says spirit of lying. But this lying is also a kind of spirit and you know

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liquors, hard drinks, are called spirits. Why are they called spirits? Because when we drink, we get spirited. And wow, the whole thing change. So, for some people the spirit of lying works just like that. Lying is fun. Lying is enjoyable, it gives us the kind of spirit, not telling the truth and then other people kind of shocks you know, wow. Then you feel like you have power. So, the spirit of lying and in the end the spirit of uncleanness. So, these are the spirits we renounced but we still deal with them. They come, we renounced. But they still come. So, after we renounced the spirits, what did we do? Do you remember when we were baptized and after renouncing the spirits, what did we do?

Yes. Spit on them. You spat on them and then you said you have nothing to do with them anymore. But look at ourselves in everyday life. We are still dealing with them and getting a lot of juicy stuff out of them. And then after that, well, what do we do? Father asks you, are you united to Christ? Yes, I do. Are you united with Christ? Yes, I do. Are you united with Christ? That means are you with Christ? Is Christ in you? So now Christ is in us and we started living. However, these spirits come back and tease us as we all know.

This is the problem. This man who lived in the tombs and all naked had these problems. He was possessed by these spirits and he was really spirited, I would say. And then this is a really amazing thing and you have to go home and read the section once again and then we find out exactly what it is, is that when Christ asked him who he was, this man answered, "I'm Legion because there are many." And then this is amazing the way I read this text over and over again and I find out that fantastic because how this man identifies with his spirits and his spirits identifies with him. It's just that they're two I they're possessed by the demons. Now how would you express this phenomenon and I know it is not just an American expression, it's a good solid English expression. How would you express this phenomenon?

We often hear 'monkey on our back' and monkey, once you have a monkey... I mean this monkey is really... like when did we get this monkey on our back? And we are not born with this monkey, and nobody- when we are born, we are born as we are, and along the way this monkey came and then just got on our back. And not only that, as we grew, we feed him and so they get heavier and heavier. And the thing is that he's not just one but he, he gets buddies and then they feed on us, really. And then we are kind of innocent, so we easily respond to that. And so, by the time when we are 30 years, not 30 years, maybe like about... the monkey comes up and tried to get on us is around seven, eight, just around that time monkey started coming. And then by the time you get to be 35 monkey is pretty big because you feed him or them every single day. So, by the time you get to be 30 it's sagging. It's a really big monkey you have to deal with.

Now this is why Christ, our Lord came and we decided we want to get rid of this monkey and this monkey piggyback right on ours and moves our head and we see things and then he responds and he tells you what to do and you see this how it works in us. So, it's not just in the Bible, it's not just in the miracle there and that have nothing to do with us. Not at all. And in the Orthodox Church and it's from the apostle times that being possessed by monkey is dubbed in different ways and different ways end up.

First of all, do you remember what St. James says about tongue? Our tongue is the rudder and if you know the rudder so if you know how to use the rudder correctly, you get to the right direction. But if you don't, you get lost. The tongue, the way we speak, what we are saying and exactly when we have

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this monkey, monkey talks for you and not you. And then later we realized, oh, I should not have said that I hurt her, or I hurt him. And of course, you hurt him because you listened to this monkey on your back. And this is the facts about our life. And as we enter in the Kingdom of God daily, if we want to, daily we have to do exorcism on ourselves on this and then we have to find the terminator for this monkey. And then you know what the six items for this as a terminator of this monkey is: the first humility, prayer, fasting and repentance and forgiveness and having a loving heart.

These are the terminators of the monkey on our back. And if we do it well, he leaves us and then we realize what it means to recite O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth who art everywhere and present us fills all things and treasure of good gifts and come and abiding in us, instead of all these spirits in us, the spirit of idle worship, covetousness, lying, uncleanness and the rest. There are just tons of them out there are trying to get on our back, but we recite O Heavenly King as we do in every meeting and the beginning and whenever we pray to God we recite, we want not the spirits of all these evil, devil and Satan, but rather the Spirit of God, the truth, the Holy Spirit in us so that we will be able to grow out of ourselves, getting rid of this monkey on our back and we will have life and peace and quietness sitting right next to our Lord Jesus Christ, like this man who was healed from this demon- possessed state.

Amen.