When a man or woman or child falls into the life of sin they find themselves inching closer to the demons and further from the Master of Creation. This is the case no matter how small or insignificant the sins may seem to us at the time because sin is a rebellion against God our creator. Sin is a delusion and also a form of permission. We are permitting the unholy and rejecting the holy in our lives.

We see this in today’s gospel reading as the man who was possessed by demons is actually naked and lives not in a normal house but among the dead in the tombs. It is in fact a fitting place for him because his relationship with sin has made him friends with the demons and estranged him from God who is the life-giver. As we become a less godly nation, as people become less Christian, we find ourselves more at risk.

We see something interesting happen as the demoniac encounters Our Lord Jesus Christ. He cries out and falls to the ground. The man who was strong enough to break free of chains and to escape from his guards became like a little screaming toddler before the Lord of glory. He cried out “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” What had the Lord done to cause the demon possessed man to react in such a way, to fall to the ground and cry out and beg? Nothing. It was simply the presence of Jesus that caused horror and torment to the man. This falls very much in line with our understanding of the afterlife and the presence of God. His presence is experienced as warmth, light and joy to those who struggle during their lives for holiness and the love of God and neighbor.

We see here the power of the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ when He draws near to the demoniac. It is the teaching of the Orthodox Church that even the name of the Lord Jesus Christ has a similar power in the lives of the faithful. Many of the saints, fathers and mothers of the Church teach us to say the Jesus prayer (sometimes simply known as “the prayer”). When we are disturbed or lack peace, when we are angry or feeling impatient, when we have lustful thoughts….we can turn to the prayer. The short prayer “Lord Jesus, haver mercy on me” is powerful in it’s ability to return us to our proper state. According to one of the saints, the mere mention of the name of Jesus is like a whip on the backs of the demons who try to whisper and tempt us. The name of Our Lord, coupled with the sign of the cross, is like a forceful repellent against our enemies. The demons are terrified by His name.

The practice of this prayer allows each of us to be in our right mind. Over the course of time, the fire of the name of Christ burns away the thorns of desires and leaves only what is good. It is not insignificant that when the Lord Jesus heals the man, we then find this man sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. He had been naked, homeless. Now we see the opposite. It is a not so subtle way of telling us that when one is sitting at the feet of Jesus, in His presence, listening to His words, he is like a new man. We have perfect sanity when we are sitting at the feet of Jesus. Whether we are on our knees praying before the icons or worshiping liturgically or sitting and reading the gospels or even listening to sermons and homilies. In each of these cases we are offered restoration and healing which lead to sanity and a renewed life. It is not possible for the Giver of life to give less than that.

We should deal with what is evil, fleshly and demonic in our lives as if it is a terrible torment and burden and we should cast it off through repentance and the saying of the Jesus prayer. When we do this God will show mercy to us and relieve us of these burdens and afflictions and we will be found seated in the presence of the Lord, clothed with the garment of righteousness and salvation and with our hearts and minds enlightened. All of this He will do in us, because He is the only lover of mankind. AMEN