

Dearly beloved: Christ is in our midst!

Who is in charge of the world? Given all of the disasters, both natural such as hurricanes and earthquakes, and man-made such as wars, it's a question that I've heard from some persons, mostly non-Orthodox. God created the world but is God running the world or is the devil running amok causing all of this? Who has authority in this world?

Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us how much power the demons have now that He, Jesus, has come in the world. The man who was ruled by the multitude of demons was freed from their power by Jesus. And even the demons couldn't enter the pigs without Jesus giving them leave to do so. They couldn't even control the swine which rather than be possessed ran off a cliff and drowned.

Elsewhere Jesus says "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out." (John 12:31) The ruler Jesus is referring to is the devil. And the devil has no power over God. Nor does the devil have power over us. Before we were baptized these words were said over us, speaking to God "Expel every evil and unclean spirit which hides and makes it lair in his/her heart." Then we swear off Satan, spitting upon him.

We believe what we say and we say what we believe. These words make clear that the devil's power is in vain. He has been conquered and cast down by our Lord Jesus Christ. He has no more power over us than he had over the swine among the Gerasenes. "The grace of baptism has driven (the devil) out (of us) completely, and light and darkness do not cohabit." (Fr. Gabriel Bunge) Yet the demon finds in the world that surrounds us, our own habits, our weakness of will, natural allies for himself of which he makes full use. He tempts us and we can give into the temptations he sends us. We struggle against those things he would have us do rather than what God would have us do. The only power the devil has is what power we give to him by following his advice and his promptings rather than the promptings of the Holy Spirit in us. So while the devil does not control us yet he does try to trip us up to keep us from following our Lord Jesus Christ. In the words of Saint Paul, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness..." (Ephesians 6:12)

The devil is crafty and will take an evil deed and make it appear good. Take something spiritually ugly and make it appear beautiful. Take what is base and make it appear righteous. The devil wants to engage us in conversation about a temptation so that by engaging it we're one step closer to giving in to it, to committing sin. Not every temptation is from the devil. Temptations come also from the fallen aspects of the world and from the fallenness of our human nature. Whenever we enter into dialogue with those thoughts, when we confront a temptation and ponder it telling ourselves "this really isn't that bad a thing, it's a small sin" we are handing the devil a victory. The key for us is to banish the thought completely. Making the sign of the Cross when we are tempted is a powerful act. Say the Jesus Prayer: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Get up from what we're doing and open the Bible to read from the Psalms or the Gospels.

We sing from Psalm 92 at every Saturday evening Vespers, "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, He is girded with strength." (Psalm 92:1) It is the Lord God Who is almighty, Who has won the victory over the death and the devil. Let us be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might (Ephesians 6:10) that we may live to give glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, unto ages of ages. Amen.