

HOMILY FOR WEDNESDAY, MAY 20TH, 2026 – MATTHEW 8: 28 – 34

Our reading from Matthew this evening is but 7 verses long, but it is packed with meaning. Meaning that can easily be missed when it is taken out of context, and when it is presumed to be simply the literal account of an event. First let us start with context. Chapter 8 in Matthew follows the account of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus outlines how we should all behave towards God and neighbour. Chapter 8 follows the teaching in the sermon with a series of miracles that act as evidence for the authority of Jesus. Before our passage, Jesus cleanses a leper, heals a centurion's servant, heals a multitude at Peter's house, and stills a storm. Then he casts out the demons from the two men in a tomb.

In the 7 verses, I count 7 major points of meaning: Firstly, Jesus demonstrates complete authority over the demonic realm, he says nothing, but the demons immediately recognize him as the Son of God. They so address him before he utters a word. They submit to his commands and fear his judgment. Secondly, in freeing of the men from the demons he restores life to men who were completely subject to demonic forces, living in a place of death. Thirdly, earlier in Chapter 8 Jesus gets in a boat with the disciples to cross the lake, it is during that crossing that he stills the storm. Crossing the lake makes it very likely that he is headed for the Decapolis, Gentile territory. The destination is confirmed when we read that there was a great herd of swine. The same story in Mark, says that there were 2000. Pigs are treif or unclean. No one in a Jewish area would keep a heard of swine. Matthew the most Jewish of the Gospel writers is making it clear that Jesus is not there just for Jews. He is there for everyone – Jew and Gentile. Fourthly, the destruction of the entire herd of swine when possessed by the demons illustrates both how powerful and how destructive is evil. Fifthly, and closely related to the fourth point, the entire passage outlines the struggle between good and evil, and establishes that only Jesus as supreme leader can ensure the triumph of good. Sixthly, the reaction of the local population appalled at the loss of their valuable asset in the herd of swine, they beg Jesus to leave their district more concerned with wealth than the fate of the two men in the tomb. Finally Jesus clearly establishes that a single human life is more important than any amount of economic assets.

In summary with Jesus, good can triumph over evil; Jesus sets life as a priority; Jesus is Saviour of the whole world not just the heirs of the Mosaic covenant; the demonic while enormously powerful, can only lead to destruction. An unhealthy attachment to assets at the expense of human life is demonic and does lead to destruction. If we follow Jesus we must choose life.

Not bad for only 7 verses! But what does it all mean to us. Well I doubt that any one of us has even one pig leave alone 2000. But to what are we attached that matters more than good, than life for others, than our faith in the triune God? Possessions in and of themselves are not evil. Evil slips in when we cannot keep our having those possessions in perspective. When our possessions begin to

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matter more than justice, more than care, more than love. We all face the temptation to hold God at bay rather like St. Augustine with his infamous prayer, *Make me good, but not yet!*

Let me tell you two stories. Last week as most of you know, I was at Sorrento for the church as an assessor of prospective priests. One of the candidates said to me that he really liked working with people who were challenged either economically or with health issues, but he confessed that he didn't have much patience for some people he knew who all had very good jobs and were preoccupied with amassing money, increasing profits, and having a really good time. I quietly suggested to him that maybe their preoccupations were a screen to cover up some major insecurities and maybe even a spiritual void. Maybe they needed a priest just as much or more than the people with whom he felt truly comfortable. Give him his due, he thought for a bit and said he was going to have to work harder to be a priest for all.

The second story might be entitled, preacher heal thyself. My parents brought my sister and me to Canada from Scotland in 1957. By Christmas of that year my parents had \$14.00 in all the world. My father worked hard and my mother could make a dollar go a myriad of ways. We were never hungry, but there were few nice things, no art, and nothing like what many of my fellow school mates had. I have always been in danger of over valuing nice things, good art, and an elegant life as an antidote to all the years I was told that I had champagne tastes with beer money and ideas above my station.

In differing, but similar ways, the prospective priest and I have to fight valuing the superficial over the truly important. I hope neither the person I met last week nor I are as bad as the owners of the Gadarene swine, but we both need to be hyper-vigilant in our own way.

We live in a world in which a very small number of people own a very large percentage of the total wealth of the world. We can rail against their hoarding wealth to the deprivation of others, but we should also be aware of the spiritual damage they are doing to themselves as well as the spiritual damage of those who are consumed with envy at all that the few have, even though many of the most envious have more than enough. Envy is of course one of the 7 deadly sins – arguably one of the worst demons of our time.

I learned recently that Franklin Roosevelt proposed around 1940 that income over \$25,000 a year, which is the equivalent of \$2 million today, should be taxed at 100%. His rationale was not that the government needed the money. His rationale was that such wealth was a threat to democracy. We have certainly seen his worst fears come true, especially in the United States. I would argue that not just democracy was threatened, spiritual health has also taken a severe beating.

We follow the risen Lord, he who can uniquely triumph over demons. Let us all pray that we can remember whom we follow and that we can all keep mammon in perspective. Amen.