

## ON THE DEVIL AND EXORCISM

### (A MINI-HOMILY)

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

The demons have no authority over the men of God.

[Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos), *The Taxing Of Souls*]

Today (June 30, 2007) I viewed a video (very short) of an exorcism performed in an Orthodox Church in Russia in 2006. I have placed that exorcism as # 128 in FEATURES on the St. James The Just True Orthodox Spiritual Center web site:

<http://www.stjamesthejust.com/>

Yet, we are not inundated with articles about Orthodox exorcism. It seems strange that there appears to be a relative dearth of Orthodox spiritual materials on exorcism, particularly when Our Lord was and is the Chief Exorcist of His Church. [on one Internet site for Orthodox Christian Authors and the Holy Fathers, there were only two entries for “Exorcism”.] Perhaps it is because the Roman Catholics have been having such an avalanche of their ‘exorcisms’ (particularly in Italy) that we don’t want to be so associated?

The most prolific Roman Catholic exorcist, Fr. Gabriele Amorth, stated that in nine years he had exorcised over 30,000 people with 93 of those being possessed for approximately 10 years:

I myself, in nine years of exhausting work (so much so that I have been forced to cut back my workload) have exorcised over thirty thousand people, and I have noted the name of everyone who was possessed: ninety-three so far and they had all been possessed for approximately ten years. There are people who undergo exorcisms at regular intervals over periods of ten, 15 years or more, and they are still not liberated.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that in the secular world, **this** one, we hear mostly bad things about exorcisms. I am aware of the Romanian case where allegedly a nun was chained to a cross, gagged and starved in a Romanian convent. She died apparently of suffocation due to a towel being stuffed down her mouth. [TIMES ONLINE, “Priest held Over ‘Torture Killing’”, The Times, June 20, 2005.]

Our Lord exorcised demons all the time. It is absolutely inconceivable that He would have stuffed a towel down someone’s throat as an “aid” to His driving out the demons. He commands them to come out, and they do! Isn’t it amazing what is done, sometimes,

in Christ's name. As is understood, many times restraint or a certain measured amount of force may be required during exorcisms, but this is due to the disproportionate strength sometimes encountered in the possessed person. The possessed is not the enemy. It is the demon within. The objective is to cast out the demon(s) and free the suffering, not kill them!

### What Is The True Orthodox Christian Church's Spiritual Position About Demons and the Evil One?

Well, we certainly believe that the devil exists and he is the cause of the evil in this world! "The existence of the devil and his works of evil is a teaching of Scripture, where it reveals that Jesus Christ banished demons from afflicted persons."<sup>2</sup> Christ not only came to reveal Himself but also to destroy Satan's power. The devil is a fallen angel who dominates the world of the unjust. He is the chief demon/unclean spirit. God allows him to 'pester' and test us throughout our lives until the Final Judgement.

I use the word "pester" because he cannot win against us if we hold firm. We must exercise our free will and invoke His assistance. Our methods of spiritual warfare are prayer, fasting, Scriptural reading and devoted meditation.. Our concentration is on the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbour, the latter demonstrating our love of God. We pray constantly "to our Father to lead us not into temptation but to deliver us from the evil one" (St. Matthew 6: 13).<sup>3</sup> Blessed Theophylact points out that "He did not say, from evil **men**, for it is not they who do us harm, **but the devil** (emphases supplied).<sup>4</sup> The evil one cannot win the battle. Christ has already defeated him. We can exercise our free will and either eject him or allow him into our lives.

If you are a true Christian, you cannot disbelieve in the evil one and demons. After all, Christ Himself gave the twelve disciples authority over "unclean spirits, to **cast them out** (emphasis supplied), and to heal every disease and every infirmity" (St. Matthew 10: 1). The Lord instructed the twelve to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, **cast out demons** (emphasis supplied): freely ye have received, freely give" (St. Matthew 10: 8) Our Lord ordered them out and they did as He commanded:

And He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. And in the synagogue there was a man, who had a spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee Who Thou art: the Holy One of God.' And Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Hold thy peace, and come out of him.' And when the demon had thrown him into the middle, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, 'What word is this! For with authority and power He

commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.’ (St. Luke 4: 31-36)

Please note the demon acknowledges that he knows who Jesus is! He has no doubt that He is the Son of God. The demon testifies of Christ!<sup>5</sup>

What About Exorcism?

The Orthodox Church recognises exorcism of demons. Christ was and is the Chief Exorcist, the clergy in the person of the priest is another on the spiritual front line who act for Christ; and all of us are also exorcists because our duty is to be ever vigilant against the devil and his minions and drive out them out of our lives.<sup>6</sup> When we come into His Church through Baptism, we renounce the devil; we affirm our rejection of the prince of **this** world.

Regardless of abuses in exorcism practises, this does not change the spiritual fact that demons exist, attack us, need to be repelled, and we can cast them out as Christ and the Apostles did so successfully. The devil cannot win. We can only lose. It’s up to us!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Those wishing to comment on this mini-homily are encouraged to do so by sending me an e-mail to [frphotios@tx.rr.com](mailto:frphotios@tx.rr.com).]

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Amorth, *An Exorcist tells His Story*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1999 (originally published in Italian in Italy in 1990 as *Un escorista racconta*), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. George Mastrantonis, *Exorcism*, Internet, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, OUR FAITH, p. 1 of 10.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed Theophylact, Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Luke, Vol. III*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. George C. Papademetriou, *Exorcism In The Orthodox Church*, Internet, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, OUR FAITH, p. 3 of 4.