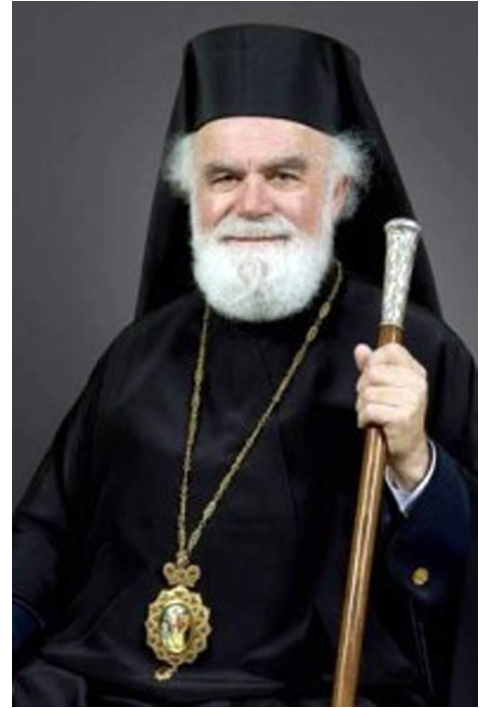


My Beloved Ones,

Today I wish to discuss a subject the Holy Fathers of our Church understand to draw on the connection between the mind, the heart, and our hands. The Fathers take the *nous* to mean the way we interact with and experience God. When a thought—pure or otherwise, enters our minds, we have a choice to accept or reject it. In the case of improper thoughts, these might be more difficult to dismiss, because they are so often related to those passions with which we are afflicted (examples might include love of food or drink, lust or gossip, among many other sins).

Having entered our mind, the thought then has the opportunity to take root in our consciousness. Without the benefit of consistent prayer, self-examination, and confession, as well as the Eucharist, the Fathers then speak of the rooted thought passing from the mind onto our spiritual heart. Once we allow our worldly desires to implant itself in our hearts, it only follows that these passions will seek their outlet from within ourselves, to the outside world.



Christ, as our loving and merciful Incarnate Lord and Savior, understands our weaknesses. We see a direct demonstration of this in this Sunday's Gospel. Jesus is passing through the region of Gadarenes, when He encounters two men possessed by demons. Matthew tells us that these men approach Jesus from the tombs, but we know from Christ's encounters with other demoniacs that such unfortunate persons were often expelled from their communities, and even chained. This was done for the safety of the community, but looking deeper we can see also a lack of compassion. These demoniacs may be under the sway of the Evil One's influence, but who among men is not tempted, or spiritually untouched by weaknesses, as we have shown?

Unlike the self-preservation shown by the neighbors, Christ shows no fear of the demoniacs. Christ approaches them, expelling the demons into the herd of swine. The rest of the Gospel is well known: how the swine perished falling from the cliffs; but the unexpected ending is that instead of reacting with wonder or amazement at our Lord's generosity and fearlessness, the townspeople beg Christ to depart. Surely this miracle was probably a frightening thing to witness, or overhear, but we should ask: are we like the townspeople, who cast off their troubled fellow men, and fearfully beg the Word of God to depart; or will we instead recognize the miraculous opportunity we have to be made spiritually whole ourselves?

Has our love of material things and the pleasures of this life so overwhelmed our hearts that we are unable to recognize Christ when He comes; are we unable to have the noetic experience for which we human beings were created? Only through fasting, prayer, and sincere repentance can we become less like the crowd of townspeople, and more like the unheard, but grateful pair.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta