

## Jesus in Magdala and Gergesa. The Demon Driven into the Swine

In the intervals of His public teaching and curing, Jesus, whenever He found Himself alone with His Apostles and disciples, prepared them for their mission. Today He led The Twelve to a retired spot near the lake, placed them in the order mentioned in the Gospel, and conferred upon them the power of healing and of casting out devils. To the other disciples, He gave only the power to baptize and impose hands. At the same time, He addressed to them a touching discourse in which He promised to be with them always and to share with them all that He possessed. The power to heal and to drive out the devil, Jesus bestowed in the form of a blessing. All wept, and Jesus Himself was very much moved. At the close He said that there was still much to be done and then they would go to Jerusalem, for the fullness of time was drawing near. The Apostles were glowing with enthusiasm. They expressed their readiness to do all that He would command and to remain true to Him. Jesus replied that there were afflictions and hardships in store for them, and that evil would glide in among them. By these words He alluded to Judas. With discourses such as the above, they reached their little barques. Jesus and The Twelve, with about five of the disciples, among them Saturnin, rowed to the east bank of the lake, down past Hippos, and landed near the little village of Magdala. This place lay close to the lake and north of the dark ravine into which flowed the waters from the pool near Gergesa, higher up the country. To the east of Magdala rose a mountain. The village was built so near to it that it enjoyed the benefit of only the midday and evening sun; it was consequently damp and foggy, especially in the neighborhood of the ravine.

Jesus and His disciples did not at once enter Magdala. Peter's barque was lying near a sandbank to which extended a bridge. As soon as Jesus stepped on shore, several possessed came running toward Him with loud cries. They asked what He wanted there, and cried out for Him to leave them in peace. This they did of their own accord. Jesus delivered them. They gave thanks, and went into the village. And now others came, bringing with them other possessed. Some of the disciples, Peter, Andrew, John, James and his cousins then went into Magdala, where they delivered the possessed and cured many sick, among others some women attacked by convulsions. They drove



out devils and commanded sickness to disappear in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. I heard some of them adding the words, "Whom the storm of the sea obeyed." Some of those that were cured by the disciples went to Jesus to hear His admonitions and instructions. He explained to them and to the disciples why the possessed were so very numerous in these parts. It was because the inhabitants were so intent upon the things of this world and so given up to the indulgence of their passions. Several of these possessed were from Gergesa, which lay up on the mountain about one hour to the east of Magdala. They infested the surrounding country, hiding in the caves and tombs. Jesus continued the cures until after twilight, and then spent the night on the barque with the disciples.

From the region of Gergesa, which had a circumference of about four hours, none had attended Jesus' instructions on the mountain.

On the following day Jesus climbed the mountain, and encountered two Jewish youths who had come from Gergesa to meet Him. They were possessed by the devil. They were not furious, though the attacks of the evil one were frequent, and they roved restlessly about. When Jesus some time before had crossed the Jordan from Tarichea and passed Gerasa, these young men were not yet possessed. They had then come out to meet Him and begged to be received among His disciples, but Jesus sent them away. Now again, after Jesus had delivered them, they desired to be received by Him.

They told Him that the misfortune from which He had just freed them never would have overtaken them if He had yielded to their first request. Jesus exhorted them to amendment of life, and bade them return home and announce by what means their deliverance had been effected. The youths obeyed. As Jesus went along, pausing here and there to teach before the huts and homes of the shepherds, many possessed and simpletons ran hiding behind the hedges and hills, crying after Him and making signs for Him to keep off and not disturb their peace. But Jesus called them to Him, and delivered them. Many of those thus freed cried out, imploring Him not to drive them into the abyss! Some of the Apostles also performed cures by the imposition of hands, and engaged the people to repair to the mountain beyond Magdala to the south, where Jesus was going to deliver an instruction.

A great crowd assembled at the place designated. Jesus exhorted them to penance, spoke of the near approach of the Kingdom of God, and reproached them with clinging to the goods of this world. He spoke also of the value of the soul. They should know, He said, that God prizes the soul more highly

than man's great, worldly possessions. By these last words, Jesus made reference to the herd of swine which was soon to be precipitated into the lake, for the people had invited Jesus to go again to Gergesa. To this invitation Jesus replied that He would indeed accept it, but that His coming would be an untimely one for them, and that they would not give Him a very warm welcome. They begged Him not to traverse the ravine on His return to them, for there were two furious possessed roaming about in it who had broken their chains and had already strangled some people. But Jesus responded that on that very account He would, when it was time, go that way, for He had been sent upon earth for the sake of the miserable. It was at this conjuncture that He uttered the passage in which it is said, "If Sodom and Gomorrha had heard and seen the things that have taken place here in Galilee, they would have done penance."

When Jesus was about to depart, the people prayed Him to tarry awhile longer, for never had they heard so pleasing a discourse. It was, they said, like the morning sunbeams shining upon their gloomy, foggy home. They begged Him to remain, for it was already dark. To this Jesus replied in a similitude on the darkness: He feared not this darkness, but they should dread remaining in eternal darkness, and that at a time in which the light of the Word of God had shone upon them. Then He retired to the ships with the disciples. They rowed at first as if directing their course across to Tiberias, but then turned again to the east, lay to about one hour south of the ravine, and spent the night on their ships.

Magdala was an unimportant place, smaller than Bethsaida. It was only a landing place for boats, and derived its subsistence from Hippos, which was largely engaged in trade and commerce. A highroad ran past Gerasa and down to Hippos, and was the scene of constant traffic. The country of Magdala was known also as the country of Dalmanutha, from the town that lay a couple of hours further to the south and on the other side of the ravine.

When Jesus landed next morning, several demoniacs were presented to Him, and He cured them by laying His hands upon them. The people of this region practiced sorcery. They ate of a certain herb that grew abundantly in the ravine and on the mountain, and thus became intoxicated and fell into convulsions. They had another plant of which they made use to counteract the effects of the first, but for some time past it had lost its virtue and now

the poor creatures were left in their misery. The country of the Gergeseans was a tract of land from four to five hours in length, and about a half-hour in breadth. It was distinguished from the surrounding districts by its history and the character of its inhabitants, which latter was not of the best. It began with the ravine between Dalmanutha and Magdala, included the ravine, and on the south began with and comprised ten villages scattered in a row along the narrow strip of land, with Gergesa and Gerasa at either end. Beyond Gerasa it was bounded by the region of Corozain, the land of Zin, and a district containing many deserts. On the east it was bounded by the long mountain ridge on whose southern extremity stood the citadel of Gamala; on the south, by the ravine; and on the west, the valley on the shore of the lake.

In this valley lay Dalmanutha, Magdala, and Hippos, which did not belong to the country of Gergesa, no more than the rest of the lakeshore, excepting the ravine to the south of Magdala. On the north it ended with Corozain. This district with its ten villages must not be confounded with the Decapolis, or that of the ten cities, which extended far around it and from which it was wholly distinct. In Gedeon's struggle against the Madianites, the inhabitants of the ten villages supported the pagans who since that time had acquired the upper hand and kept the Jews in great subjection. They raised in all these places, to the scandal of the Jews that dwelt there, immense numbers of swine, which in herds of several thousands were turned out to fatten in a great marsh on the northern height of the ravine. They were attended by a hundred heathen herdsmen and their boys. The marsh, which was about three quarters of an hour southeast of Gergesa, at the foot of the mountain of Gamala, discharged its boggy waters south-ward into the ravine over a dam of logs and heavy planks that changed the brook above it into a swamp.

The superfluous waters flowed through the ravine into the Sea of Galilee. Numbers of huge oaks grew near the marsh and on the sides of the ravine. No part of this region was very fertile, and only in a few sunny places grew some vines. They had also a kind of reed from which sugar can be made, but they exported it in its crude state.

It was not so much their idolatrous worship that subjected the people of this region to the power of the devil, as the depth to which they were sunk in sorcery. Gergesa and the surrounding places were full of wizards and witches who carried on their disorders by means of cats, dogs, toads, snakes, and other animals. They conjured up these creatures, and even went around in their form injuring and killing men. They were like werewolves that can hurt

people even at a distance, that take revenge after a long time upon those whom they hate, and that can raise storms at sea. The women used to brew some kind of a magical beverage. Satan had entirely conquered this region, which possessed innumerable demoniacs, raging lunatics, and victims of convulsions.

It was approaching ten in the morning when Jesus with some of the disciples mounted a little boat, crossed the brook some distance up to the stream, and rowed into the ravine. This was a shorter way than that by land. Jesus climbed the northern side of the ravine, and the disciples joined Him one after another. While He was ascending, two raging possessed higher up on the mountain were running about, darting in and out of the sepulchers, casting themselves on the ground, and beating themselves with the bones of the dead. They uttered horrible cries and appeared to be under the spell of some secret influence, for they could not flee. As Jesus drew nearer, they cried out from behind the bushes and rocks that lay a little higher up on the mountain: "Ye Powers! Ye Dominations! Come to our aid! Here comes One stronger than we!" Jesus raised His hand toward them and commanded them to lie down. They fell flat on their faces, but raising their heads again, cried out: "Jesus! Thou Son of God the Most High, what have we to do with Thee? Why art Thou come to torment us before the time? We conjure Thee in the name of God to leave us in peace!" By this time Jesus and the disciples had reached them as they lay trembling, their whole persons horribly agitated.

Jesus ordered the disciples to give them some clothing, and commanded the possessed to cover themselves. The disciples threw to them the scarves they wore around their necks and in which they were accustomed to muffle their heads. The possessed, trembling and writhing convulsively, covered themselves, as if constrained to do so against their will, arose, and cried out to Jesus not to torture them, Jesus asked: "How many are ye?" They answered, "Legion." The wicked spirits spoke always in the plural by the mouth of these two possessed. They said that the evil desires of these men were innumerable. This time the devil spoke the truth. For seventeen years these men had lived in communication with him, and in the practice of sorcery. Now and then they had suffered assaults like the present, but for the last two years they had been running, frantic, around the desert. They had been entangled in all the abominations of magic.

Nearby was a vineyard on a sunny slope, and in it an immense wooden vat formed of great beams. It was not quite the height of a man, but so broad that twenty men could stand in it. The Gergeseans used to press in it grapes mixed with the juice of that intoxicating herb of which I have spoken. The juice ran into little troughs and thence into large, earthen vessels with narrow necks which, when full, were buried underground in the vineyard.

This was that intoxicating beverage which produced effects so fatal upon all that drank of it. The herb was about the length of one's arm, with numerous thick green leaves one above the other, and it terminated in a bud. The people of these parts used the juice in order to rouse in themselves diabolical ecstasies. On account of its inebriating vapors, the drink was prepared in the open air, though during the operation a tent was erected over the vat. The pressmen were just coming to their work when Jesus commanded the possessed, or rather the legion in them, to overturn the vat. The two men seized the great, full vat, turned it upside down without the least difficulty, the contents streamed around, and the workmen fled with cries of terror.

The possessed, trembling and shuddering, returned to Jesus, and the disciples also were very much frightened. The devil now cried out by the mouth of the possessed, begging Jesus not yet to cast them into the abyss, not yet to drive them from this region, and ended by the request: "Let us go into yonder swine!" Jesus replied: "Ye may go!" At these words the two miserable possessed sank down in violent convulsions, and a whole cloud of vapors issued from their bodies in numberless forms of insects, toads, worms, and chiefly mole-crickets.

A few moments after, there arose from the herds of swine sounds of grunting and raging, and from the herdsmen shouts and cries. The swine, some thousands in number, came rushing from all quarters and plunged down through the bushes on the mountainside. It was like a furious tempest, mingled with the cries and bellowings of animals. This scene was not the work of a few minutes only. It lasted a couple of hours, for the swine rushed here and there, plunging headlong and biting one another. Numbers precipitated themselves into the marsh and were swept down over the waterfall, and all went raging toward the lake.

The disciples looked on disquieted, fearing lest the waters in which they fished, as well as the fish themselves, would be rendered impure. Jesus

divined their thoughts, and told them not to fear, since the swine would all go down into the whirlpool at the end of the ravine. There was at this place a great pool of stagnant water completely separated from the lake by a sandbank, or strip of shore. It was overgrown with reeds and bushes, and at high water was frequently submerged. This pool was a deep abyss which, through the sandbank, had an inlet from the lake, but no outlet into the same, and in it was a whirlpool. It was into this caldron the swine plunged.

The herdsmen who had, at first, run after the animals, now came back to Jesus, saw the possessed who had been delivered, heard all that had happened, and then began to complain loudly of the injury done them. But Jesus replied that the salvation of these two souls was worth more than all the swine in the world. Then He bade them go to the owners of the swine and say that the devil, whom the godlessness of the inhabitants of this country sent into men, had by Him been driven out of the men, and that they had gone into the swine! The possessed who had been delivered, Jesus sent to their homes to procure clothing, while He Himself with the disciples went up toward Gergesa. Several of the herdsmen had already run to the city and, in consequence of the reports they spread, people came pouring out from all sides. They that had been cured at Magdala, as well as the two Jewish youths cured the day before, and most of the Jews of the city, had assembled to wait for Jesus' coming. The two possessed, now cured, came back in a short time decently clothed, to hear Jesus' preaching. They were distinguished pagans belonging to the city, relatives of some of the pagan priests.

The people employed in preparing the wine mentioned above, and whose full vat had been overturned, were also running about the city, publishing everywhere the loss they had sustained at the hands of the possessed. This gave rise to great alarm and uproar. Many ran to see whether they could rescue some of the swine, while others hurried out to the wine cask. The confusion lasted until after nightfall.

Jesus meanwhile was instructing on a hill about one-half hour from Gergesa. But the chief men of the city and the pagan priests sought to keep the people from Him by telling them that Jesus was a mighty sorcerer through whom great evils would come upon them. When they had taken counsel together, they sent out a deputation to Jesus with instructions to hasten and beg Him not to tarry in those parts and not to do them still greater injury. The deputies added that they recognized in Him a great magician, but begged

Him to withdraw from their boundaries. They sorely lamented their swine and the overturning of their brewing vat. Their fright and amazement were extreme when they beheld the two possessed, cured and clothed, sitting among the listeners at Jesus' feet. Jesus bade them dismiss their fears, because He would not trouble them long. He had come for the sake of the poor sick and possessed alone, since He knew well that the unclean swine and the infamous beverage were of more value to them than the salvation of their souls. But the Father in Heaven, who had given to Him the power to rescue the poor people before Him and to destroy the swine, judged otherwise. Then He held up to them all their infamy, their sinful dealing in sorcery, their dishonest gains, and their demonolatry. He called them to penance, to Baptism, and offered them salvation. But they had the injury done them, the loss of the swine, in their heads, and so persisted in their pressing, though half-frightened request, that He would go away. After that they returned to the city.

Judas Iscariot was particularly busy and active among the Gergeseans, for he was well-known in these parts. His mother had dwelt here with him for some time when he was still young, and just after he had run away from the family in which he had been secretly reared. The two possessed were acquaintances of his youth.

The Jews rejoiced in secret over the loss sustained by the Gentiles in their swine, for they were very much oppressed by them and greatly scandalized on account of the unclean animals. Still there were many among them who lived on easy terms with the pagans and defiled themselves with their superstitious practices.

All that had been cured on that day and the day before, as also the two possessed, were baptized by the disciples. They were very much impressed and thoroughly changed. The two possessed last delivered and the two Jewish youths entreated Jesus to allow them to remain with Him and be His disciples. To the two last delivered, Jesus replied that He would give them a commission, namely, they should go through the ten villages of the Gergeseans, show themselves everywhere, and everywhere relate what had happened to them, what they had heard and seen, call the inhabitants to penance and Baptism, and send them to Him. He added that they should not be troubled if they were greeted by a shower of stones from those whom



they addressed. If they executed this commission properly, they should receive in recompense the spirit of prophecy. Then they would always know where to find Him, in order to send thither those that desired to hear His teachings, and they should impose hands on the sick, who would thereby be healed. Having thus spoken, Jesus blessed the two young men, who on the next day began their mission, and later on became disciples.

The Apostles in baptizing here used water that they had brought with them in leathern bottles. The people knelt in a circle around them, and they baptized three at a time out of the basin that one held, sprinkling each three times with water scooped up in the hand.

That evening Jesus and the disciples entered Gergesa, and went to the house of the ruler of the synagogue. Then came the magistrates of the city urging the ruler to make Jesus depart as soon as possible, and threatening to hold Him responsible for any further injury the city might sustain at His hands. Jesus told the disciples that He had permitted the demons to overturn the vat and to enter into the swine, that the proud pagans might see that He was the Prophet of the Jews whom they so shamefully despised and oppressed. He wished at the same time, as He said, by the loss of the swine, in which so many of them bore a share, to draw the attention of these people to the danger that threatened their souls, and to arouse them from the sleep of sin that they might hearken to His teaching. The beverage He had allowed to be wasted as it was the principal cause of their vices and demoniacal possession.

On the following day a great crowd again gathered around Jesus, for His miracles had become known throughout the whole country, and many Jews who had been converted left Gergesa at once.

The Apostles, who had been healing in the villages nearby, returned in time for Jesus' discourse, bringing with them those they had cured. There were some women among them carrying baskets of provisions, which they gave to the Apostles. Once when Jesus was closely pressed by the crowd, a woman from Magdala approached Him. She was afflicted with an issue of blood. Though long unable to walk, she had gathered up strength to slip alone through the crowd and to kiss His garment, whereupon she was healed. Jesus went on with His discourse, but after a little while He said: "I have healed someone. Who is it?" At these words, the woman drew near, giving thanks.

She had heard of Enue's cure, and had imitated her example. That evening Jesus, the disciples, and the two Jewish youths lately delivered from demoniacal possession, left Gergesa, journeyed around Magdala, and climbed the mountain north of Hippos. This last named place was not situated on the lake, but on a mountain some distance inland. Jesus and His followers descended on the opposite side and put up at a shepherd's house.

Here Jesus reminded the disciples that the birthday of Herod would soon be celebrated, and told them that He intended going to Jerusalem. They tried to dissuade Him from doing so, saying that the Pasch was now not far off, and then they should be obliged to go. But Jesus replied in such a way as to give them to understand that He did not intend to show Himself openly at the feast. The two Gergesean disciples again begged to be allowed to accompany Him. Jesus replied that He had another mission in reserve for them, namely, to go around among the ten cities between Cedar and Paneas, and announce to the Jews of those places all that they had seen and heard. He gave them His benediction and made them the same promises as to the other two.

If they fulfilled their commission well, the spirit of prophecy should be given to them, they should always know His whereabouts, and should be able to heal the sick in His name. As with the others, so too with them, a certain time had to elapse before these promises would be realized. The two others had first to announce Him in the ten Gergesean villages, and afterward to the heathens of the Decapolis. The youths bade farewell to Jesus, who directed the disciples to go to Bethsaida and, in spite of their entreaties, He Himself remained behind. He retired into a wilderness near the shore to pray. I saw Him walking about among the steep, rocky hills, some of which looked black and like human figures amid the darkness of night.

It was already quite dark when I saw Jesus walking straight over the waves. It was almost opposite Tiberias, a little eastward of the middle of the lake. He appeared as if intending to pass within a little distance of the disciples' barque. The high wind was contrary, and the disciples weary of rowing. When they saw the figure on the waves, they were affrighted, for they knew not whether it was Jesus or His spirit, and they cried aloud from fear. But Jesus called out: "Fear not! It is I!" Then Peter cried: "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee upon the waters." And Jesus said: "Come!" Peter, in his ardor, leaped on the little ladder and out of the boat. He hurried along for a short distance on the troubled waters toward Jesus, as if on level

ground. It seemed to me that he hovered over the surface, for the inequality of the waves appeared to be no obstacle to his progress. But when he began to wonder, and to think more of the sea, its winds and its waves, than of the words of Jesus, he grew frightened and commenced to sink. Crying out, "Lord, save me!" he sank up to the breast and stretched out his hand. Instantly Jesus was at his side. He seized his hand and said: "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" Then they entered the barque, and Jesus reproached Peter and the others for their fear. The wind lulled immediately and they steered toward Bethsaida. A ladder was always in readiness to be thrown over the side of the boat for the convenience of those about to enter.