

Exorcisms in Russia

(Written by Nun Cornelia, April 1995)

No Orthodox Christian in Russia doubts the existence of Demons, and that they wage brutal war against people. Neither do they doubt that Christ is stronger than demons; that He has won the war and continues to conquer. Why are they so sure? Because they see it with their own eyes. They see the pitiful victims of demonic possession who come to church to find relief but are tormented by the demons for doing so. Anywhere we go in the world we can see the result of diabolical hatred, violence, lewdness, profanity, coldness of heart however, we fail to see the cause. But in the presence of the power of God, they are unmasked and revealed. The curtain is withdrawn that hides the puppeteer behind the puppets.

When I was in Russia, I stayed near a monastery where a priest lived who performed exorcisms. The rite of exorcism in the Orthodox Church is a formal service that has been the same for centuries. It includes generous amount of holy water, and is highlighted by the reading of the Gospel passages wherein Christ drives the demons out of people and demonstrates His authority over them. Just as the demons in the Gospels wail and lament when Christ appears, so they wail during these services.

Once the services are in full swing, the demons being to show themselves. One woman rages in a male voice, another person shakes violently, another shrieks in fear,

yet another is thrown to the floor, losing consciousness. They scream their hatred for the priest, vowing to have their revenge as he douses them with holy water. Some demons make jokes some sound like dissatisfied customers ("I don't have to take this!"), others are just raw anger and hatred. But the loudest noise always seems to be that of animals: mooing, crowing, and especially barking and growling.

Not all of the victims were adults. I saw one young girl being dragged and carried up to the priest. She was flailing and howling and wailing. When the priest finally came close enough to douse her with holy water, she moaned in a ghostly voice, which trailed off as she stopped her thrashing, finally collapsing. I saw another boy, held in his mother's arms, who has the appearance of a poor, special ed. Child. He looked as though he was in distress and pain, just before he vomited on the floor.

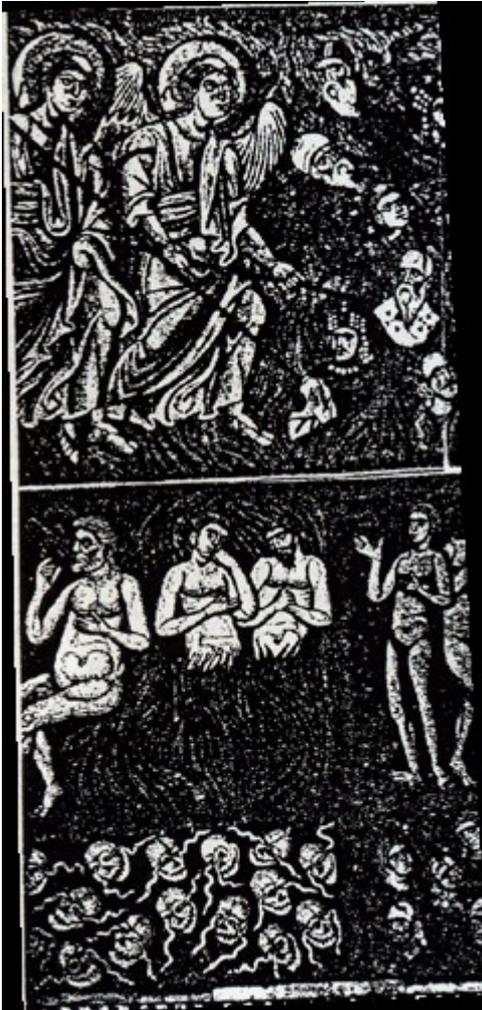
Everywhere wailing, moaning, barking, convulsions, shrieking. It was a vision of hell. "Yes, you may attend," the priest permitted me after I asked to witness and exorcism, "But stand near the icon of the Mother of God, and say the Jesus Prayer ('Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner')."

This is not something to be taken lightly. It is not a horror film, not a ghost story, but pure evil tormenting real human beings.



Naturally, I could not help but wonder why these people are possessed. But it is not right to inquire they are sufferer and it is not for me to judge. But there are cases when the demon itself provides the answer. One woman was being exorcised when, to the priest's astonishment, the demon informed him that God Himself does not will that she be released, "She killed three babies in her womb," the demon revealed, "I am here to punish her." Very many ended up in their pitiful state after going to "psychic healers." They had turned to these so-called healers with some physical illness, or simply in search of pseudo-spirituality, and received some relief of fulfillment. But then they became demonically possessed, for the "healing" or "experience" was made possible solely through the psychic's own pacts with demonic powers. These people, however, were impossible to help if they were not prepared to abandon the pseudo-spirituality and embrace the spiritual life of the Church, putting their trust in Christ. But what about the children? What had they done to deserve this? Usually they have nothing. Their parents had brought this catastrophe upon them by their own unwholesome lives. This may sound strange and unfair, but we all acknowledge that a mother who smokes puts smoke into her child's lungs, and a

mother who drinks nurses her child with alcohol. When a father curses, he puts curse words into his child's vocabulary. So is it really so surprising that parents who immerse themselves in the forces of darkness being those forces down upon their children? The service concludes and I am in awe. The priest's countenance us one of intense concentration, authority and sternness. Throughout the service he held the



holy water sprinkler like I mighty whip; now he holds the cross as an invincible shield and a trophy of victory. His long, grey hair is a bit tousled, and sweat glistens on his forehead. Those poor people kiss the cross and clamor desperately to receive his blessing, then gradually leave the church. They feel better. In spite of the demon's torment during the service, they now feel relieved and strengthened. They can go on, they are no longer overcome by despair.

Some people come to the exorcisms thinking that they are possessed, but they are not, it is a sort of spiritual hypochondria. Others speak blasphemies against God and man, not realizing whose mouthpiece they are being, and therefore will not even consider going to church. But wonders never cease. Once when the Communists were in power, some top party members were "touring" the monastery, laughing at its out datedness. One of these happened into the church where an exorcism was taking place. You can imagine the confusion that ensued when she began crowing involuntarily, like a rooster. She realized her great mistake in denying God, and became a Christian.

Still others have chronic, seemingly incurable illnesses that bring them to the monastery in search of healing, and there they encounter the power of Christ, which exposes the demon inhabiting them. Then the battle begins fasting, praying, repenting, suffering. These are their "medicines." But what is the doctor's scalpel? **Humility**. I cannot forget one incident related to me by a possessed woman herself. At her exorcism, the demon in her reviled the priest, saying that he would spit on him. "Go ahead," the priest answered, "Spit. It will make me humbler." At this the demons shrieked as if seared by a blowtorch. But this is not surprising. Jesus Christ, by Whose authority this Orthodox priest, and indeed all those apostles, saints and righteous ones before cast out devils, was also spat upon, reviled, even crucified. But the devil's rage was his own defeat.

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