

**4TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JUNE 11/24, 2007**

ROMANS 6: 18-23

ST. MATTHEW 8: 5-13

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Boldness In Faith

Be bold in your faith! Ask for things spiritually appropriate, and God will grant them:

One who believes rightly has great boldness towards God, and one who approaches Him with such boldness obtains everything that he asks, **if** (emphasis supplied) it be for his benefit.¹

If we sincerely believe in God, he will help us, for God will glorify such persons and give them eternal life. When we come to Him, come in faith and ask for spiritually worthy things. If you ask for the wrong things, he will not grant them:²

Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask wrongly for yourselves, that ye might consume it in your desires for pleasure. (St. James 4: 3)

Devoutly ask the Lord to grant us all things leading to salvation:

You fight and war for **temporal** glory, and you are not able to procure it, surely for the reason that you have not taken care to ask the Lord to bestow upon you all those things that lead to salvation. For if you would ask Him with **devout intention**, he would grant you **necessary** (emphases supplied) earthly things to use now and good things from above to enjoy forever.

St. Bede, *Commentary on James*, 48³

The Centurion's Faith

So, faithfully approach the Lord with “just and useful things,” and you cannot go wrong: as the centurion did!⁴ Remember how Jesus taught His disciples? He withdrew to a mountain to get away from the crowds. In today's Gospel, He is back among the crowds in His ‘residence’ of Capernaum.

The centurion, a Roman soldier/guard, comes to Him “with great humility and reverence, and fervently asks for healing”.⁵ The centurion knew Christ could heal by His word alone. He **believed** this in his heart! Additionally, he comes to Christ not for himself, but nobly for his servant, who is near death. He respectfully mentioned that his servant was at home sick in bed with the palsy. Jesus anticipates that the centurion wants him healed and promises not only to heal him but to come to his home:

This He does because He wishes to show the faith and virtue of the centurion. For if the Lord had not made such a promise, but had simply said, Go, thy servant will get well, we would not have learned of the centurion's faith.⁶

Christ Need Only Speak

The centurion's words speak volumes “Lord, I am **not** worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word **only**, and my servant shall be healed (emphases supplied).” He labels himself unworthy of His visit, so he is content with a word from Him. A word will do. He knows it! He believes it! The Lord need not come, just speak the word and his servant **shall** be healed.

He didn't ask Jesus to pray for him. He recognised Him as the Master:

One who possesses and is able to give, One who gives orders, not one who is ordered.... Speak but the word, and my servant shall be healed. The power of Thy word, O Lord, changed water into wine at the wedding; it blessed five loaves and fed countless crowds. Can it be that my servant will not be arise at Thy word?... The authority of Thy commands reveal Thee as the Master and Maker.⁷

The centurion “draws an analogy” regarding how Christ can do it by words only. For if the centurion serves the emperor and commands soldiers answering to him, how much more so can He command death and illnesses! After all, the illnesses of the body answer to Christ since they are “God’s soldiers and officers of punishment”.⁸ Christ as God Almighty was “powerful and supreme” compared to him.⁹

The Gentile’s Faith ‘trumped’ The Israelites!

Christ marvelled at his intense faith. His was a greater one than found among the Israelites.¹⁰ He wasn’t an Israelite, didn’t know the Jewish Scriptures, which prophesied of Him and Israelites read daily; yet, he came to faith so readily.¹¹

Many Others, Including Gentiles, Will Sit At Table

The Lord stated that many shall come from the east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is a roundabout way of saying that the gentiles will be seated.¹² But by saying east and west “He includes every place on the inhabited earth.”¹³ This isn’t inconsistent with the “Old Dispensation.” Gentile believers, too, call Abraham their father. “They are likened to him by faith; wherefore, they will share his bliss and honour.”¹⁴

Outer & Inner Darkness And The Gnashing Of Teeth

By mentioning the “outer darkness,” He illustrates there is also “an inner darkness which is less severe. For in hell there are varying degrees of punishment”.¹⁵ (also see fn 18 ahead)

The centurion’s faith was so strong that he realised God was **everywhere** and did “all things by His word alone”. The Jews imagined that they were children of the kingdom, yet did not believe in the kingdom’s Master; “they will fall away from the heavenly kingdom, from their lot with the patriarchs and the just”.¹⁶

Christ says that unbelievers will be cast out because of their unbelief into the outer darkness. What is it?

The outer darkness is the very worst place of torture, and constant, never-ending torment. The souls of the wicked and unbelieving are immortal, though it were better for them not to be incorruptible, because they are tormented by unquenchable fire, the outer darkness, the gnashing of teeth, the worm and unending anguish; in that they do not die, they will never see the end to those evils.¹⁷

...

Saint Ephraim:

We know from the Gospels that there are various places of torment. For it has been revealed to us that there is **outer darkness, the abode where there shall be weeping and gnashing of the teeth**; and so it follows that there is also **inner** darkness (emphases supplied). We read of the outer darkness where there shall be the fire, the unquenchable one, of the Gehenna [cf. Mk. 9: 43]. Elsewhere it speaks of where ‘their worm dieth not [Mk. 9: 44]’. We read in another place of ‘the lake of the fire, the one burning with brimstone [Rev. 19: 20].’... The wretched souls of the damned are distributed throughout these places of punishment, each according to the nature of his sins, as it is written: ‘Everyone is bound in the chains of his own sins [Prov. 5: 22].’¹⁸

The Effect Of Christ’s Healing The Centurion’s Servant

Jesus says to the centurion *Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee*, and he was healed in the home; the centurion finding the servant well upon his return:

In healing the servant by a word, Christ showed that He was speaking the truth about the rejection of the Jews and the entrance of the Gentiles (into the kingdom of heaven;) for He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.... Christ not only healed the body of the servant, but He also drew the soul of the centurion to greater faith through the miracle.¹⁹

We have learned today from Christ’s actions and words that our earnest and just requests for what is beneficial to our souls will be granted. As our souls and bodies’ Physician, He cleanses and delivers us from “all wrath, affliction and captivity,” and gives peace and comfort to the suffering, who are under siege from the prince of this world, the devil:

It is solely the work of God’s love for man, His power and mercy, to rescue us from such evils, woes and dangers, and to heal our darkness, that we may run to Him, fall down before Him and weep.²⁰

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

¹ *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, p. 285.

² *ibid.*, p. 286.

³ cited in *The Orthodox New Testament Acts, Epistles and Revelation, Volume 2 (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)* October 2000, Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, Colorado, *St. James*, Endnote # 31, p. 446.

⁴ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 286-287.

⁵ *id.*, p. 287.

⁶ *id.*, p. 288.

⁷ *id.*, pp. 289-290.

⁸ 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, p. 70.

⁹ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 292.

¹⁰ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹¹ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 292.

¹² Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹³ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 292.

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 293.

¹⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁶ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 294.

¹⁷ *id.*

¹⁸ *Orthodox New Testament, Holy Gospel Vol. 1, St. Matthew*, Saint Ephraim [*On the Varlous Places of Torment and on the Judgment*], Vossio, Tome I, Sermon 72, in Toal, III: 302-304., Endnote # 81, pp. 94-95.

¹⁹ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 295.

²⁰ *id.*, p. 296.