

**10TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JULY 23/AUG 5, 2007**

I CORINTHIANS 4: 9-16

ST. MATTHEW 17: 14-23

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel *And when they were come to the multitude, there came to Him a certain man, kneeling down to Him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to Me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*

The Demon Attacks

The father asks Christ to extend His mercy for his son, who “is lunatic”. The multitude thought the moon was the cause:

... The impression of the multitude was that the moon was the cause. The demon, to bring reproach upon the created element of God, attacks when the moon is full, and lets the victim go according to the courses of the moon, as though it were the worker of it. The demon seeks to have the people blaspheme God when they reproach His works.¹

The demon, not the moon, was the cause of his malady.² The demon would attack when the moon was full to generate blasphemy against God³

The Father's Reproach Of The Apostles Was Misdirected: Physician, Heal Thyself

The father criticises the disciples to the Lord saying *they could not cure him*. But it wasn't the Apostles' lack of spiritual power that was responsible. It was his own lack of faith:

The man was quite disbelieving, and came to the disciples with great doubts; therefore, in Christ's plan the possessed boy did not receive healing from His disciples and apostles, on account of the great lack of faith of his father. Often grace has worked for the sake of the saints, without faith on the part of those who came (to them); this man, however, forgetting his own sin of unbelief, reproached the disciples and humiliated them publicly for not being able to heal.⁴

...

Do you see how the man has shifted the blame for his own lack of faith upon the disciples, saying that they were too weak to heal?⁵

We can apply this lesson to ourselves. All of us have the tendency to try to offload the blame onto others, if we can. Perhaps this is a vexing part of American human nature, the "Johnny, did it" syndrome. "Johnny" being anyone else but us! Oh, if someone hadn't have done x, I might have done y. Let's try to correct ourselves. 'Fess up' when you've 'done it'! Look to "me" first, change what is within, and then what is without will be straightened out!

Christ Rebukes Everyone And Drives Out The Demon

The Lord shames the father for reproaching the disciples and then labels everyone as having little faith including the bystanders present "*Oh, faithless generation*, the lack of faith trumps the strength of the disciples in this instance. Not only does He rebuke these but also the sufferer. Christ drives out the demon, but he admonishes the lunatic because "he, too, lacked faith and his lack of faith had given occasion for the demon to enter him".⁶

If you find it hard to believe in demons as we go along, your faith is faltering! They are as real as you and I are!

... Jesus rebuked him, and the **devil went out of him** (emphasis supplied); according to Mark, He said, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him (St. Mark 9: 25). In calling it a spirit, He showed clearly that it was a demon which afflicted the boy. Had it been an illness caused by the disturbance of bad humours, the Lord would not have said, I charge thee. These words were clearly spoken **to a**

person (emphasis supplied); an illness is not a person; the command supposes one commanded. Furthermore, the words, Come out, and enter no more into him, make us even more certain that this was no mere illness, but some demoniac attack.⁷

The Lord Desired His Passion

Despite the multitudes present who had witnessed “a thousand such miracles wrought by Christ and His disciples,” they didn’t believe in Him at this time. He called them “a faithless and perverse generation” meaning wicked people who cannot distinguish right from wrong.⁸ When Christ states *how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you*, He illustrates his desire for His Passion, Crucifixion and leaving of His body. He is exasperated and bothered by their incurable lack of faith; thus, Christ longs for His death. But being merciful, He still cured the demoniac “that His power might be manifested to those who thought Him to be like His disciples, unable to heal suffering”.⁹

The Disciples’ Concern And The Lord’s Reply

See that the disciples did not speak to Jesus openly about this matter. They came to Him in private, *Then came the disciples to Him apart*. They wanted to know why they had been unable to cure the boy? After all, He had given them such ‘power’. It was simple, the Lord said, *Because of your unbelief*. He didn’t chastise them publicly.¹⁰ This is a lesson to us all to incorporate in our dealings with our neighbours (everyone): to express in private, out of the hearing of others, any ‘problems’ arising.

The Lord explained that strength in faith could move mountains. *Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall (emphasis supplied) remove*. In this instance, there apparently was no need to move a mountain, but there is no doubt this could be done:

The location of the mountains which the apostles moved is nowhere recorded, yet it is likely that they did move them, but the event was not written down; for not everything was written down. Or, by another interpretation, they did not move a mountain because the occasion did not present itself, but they did even greater things than that. Note how the Lord said, ‘Ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence,’ in other words, the mountain shall move when you say the word. But the apostles did not say the word as there was neither occasion nor necessity, and so they did not move mountains. But **if** (emphasis supplied) indeed they had spoken, they would have moved.¹¹

Nothing was impossible to achieve for them. The ‘mountain’ in today’s Gospel is the demon afflicting the boy. “This kind’ of demon is cast out by prayer and fasting.” Both the sufferer and the healer(s) must do so, “Whoever, then, has perfect faith can say to this

mountain, that is, to the demon, 'Remove hence'. For Christ was also referring to the demon that had gone out."¹²

Also, the devil is called a mountain, on account of his self-exaltation and pride; him the saints move easily and simply, when they wish.¹³

Jesus Foretells His **Voluntary** Passion: Joy Will Follow

The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men; and they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again. Previously, Christ had foretold what was going to happen to Him to the disciples, the voluntary essence of it; that He was going to His fate volitionally, completely aware of the ramifications and consequences (After all, he would know all these things being God!). "He was compelled by no one, but went to suffer willingly"¹⁴ He could have saved Himself at any time, but didn't because He had a much bigger agenda, salvation for the entire world:

What was there to hinder Him from fleeing or refusing to suffer, since He knew beforehand and clearly spoke of the events to come? It was to save the world, however, that Christ delivered Himself up to death, having come down to us on account of His infinite mercy.¹⁵

But we are to remember that after sorrow comes joy in His case, the fact of Christ's Resurrection on the third day: "To the sorrow He weds the joy, that He will rise."¹⁶ Joy always follows sorrow:

After He had given His disciples the doleful words that men were to kill Him, He saw that they were saddened, and He went on to tell the joyful news that He would rise again on the third day; He would not remain dead for long. Thus He also consoles us, teaching us that joyful things **always** (emphasis supplied) follow upon sorrowful, and that we should not grieve needlessly over our sorrows, but look for things happy and joyful. When we are surrounded by hopeless misfortunes, we should await better things, and when all our affairs are successful, we should expect some change.¹⁷

God does not let us become too settled in place whether it is in a joyful or sorrowful position. It is part of our spiritual testing!

Let's remember some spiritual points from our Scriptural lesson today. Keep up our spiritual guard against demoniac forces. Believe in them, if God exists so do they, and we know He does! Hold your faith unflinchingly high. Don't try to offload your problems onto someone else. Take your own spiritual responsibility.

Our faith can move mountains; and, in fact, do even more than that. Nothing is impossible when one has complete faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! We need to take up His Cross and run with it down the path of suffering toward our deification and salvation. Remember Christ voluntarily accepted His Cross. Accept Him as an unfettered act of our God-given free will. And, last but not least, emulate Christ and the Apostles by fasting and praying, praying continuously, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner!*

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

¹ Blessed Theophylact, [P.G. 123:90B (col. 332).] cited in *The Orthodox New Testament Holy Gospel, Volume 1 (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)* October 2000, Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, Colorado, *St. Matthew*, Endnote # 160, p. 108.

² 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. 149.

³ *ibid.* and see the corroborative discussion in *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. 353.

⁴ *The Gospel Commentary, ibid.*

⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁶ *id.*

⁷ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 355.

⁸ *id.*, pp. 353-354.

⁹ *id.*, p. 354.

¹⁰ *id.*, p. 356.

¹¹ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹² *id.*

¹³ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 357.

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 359.

¹⁵ *id.*

¹⁶ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹⁷ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.