

Matthew 8: 5-13.

5. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6. And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13. 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.

Although the centurion was a Roman military officer, it is clear that he was sympathetic to the Jewish people. Despite being a pagan, a member of a most arrogant and cruel religion, he possessed a profoundly spiritual nature colored by deep love, humility and faith. He apparently had been observing the Savior, Whose deeds were building faith in his heart. We see his love expressed through the concern and care that he exhibited for his sick servant, the kind of compassion that is rarely seen in people of his high rank and background. Recognizing his spiritual poverty and how profoundly superior the Savior was to him, he did not dare to think that he was worthy enough to receive Jesus in his home. At the same time, his faith was so great that he understood that the power of God is found everywhere, and therefore, the Savior did not need to see a person in order to heal him. Thus, he asks the Savior to heal his servant without going to him in person.

The Savior marveled at the depth of faith possessed by the centurion and used the occasion to teach a most important lesson. He praised his faith and compared it to the level of faith possessed by the people of the chosen nation of God, the Jews. As the chosen people, it was they who should have been in possession of this kind of faith. He predicted that many people from around the world who were not members of the chosen race would achieve salvation through their conversion to true faith, while the chosen people will perish eternally due to their rejection of faith in Him. The prediction was fulfilled when Jesus was rejected by His chosen nation and condemned to death on the cross by their leadership. Their rejection continued when they

persecuted the apostles, forcing them to go out to teach around the world to the pagan nations whose many members eagerly believed and joined the Christian Church.

In the person of the centurion we have someone who is a vivid model to us. Do we possess the same level of faith and piety that this pagan man, not having the Grace of the Holy Spirit to strengthen him, managed to achieve? If we do not, it would behoove us without delay to begin to repent and elevate our spiritual life. This is most important because it is we, Orthodox Christians, who are now God's chosen nation. Therefore, the grave warning that the Savior gave to the Jews now applies in full force to us. They had no excuse to reject the Savior, having been fully prepared for His arrival by revelation and prophesy contained in Divine Scripture and Divine Tradition. And, we have no excuse for not living according to the Commandments of God because we have been reborn spiritually by baptism, possess complete divine revelation, and have the Grace of the Holy Spirit available to us through the sacraments in the Church. This Grace, if we use it, will empower us to be able to live piously and reach the Heavenly Gates for a blessed eternity with our Savior.

My dear brothers and sisters, this past week we have been given such a powerful measure of joyous Grace during the incredibly wonderful celebration of St John's glorification. Let us use this Grace and multiply it in our personal lives. Then, let us use the Church sacraments to increase it even more, enabling us through sincere efforts to live more perfectly. And may St. John, through his prayers before the Throne of God, make firm our will to do this.

With Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar