

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 9:17-31

*17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;*

*18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.*

*19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

*20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

*21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.*

*22 And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

*23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*

*24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

*25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

*26 And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.*

*27 But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

*28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?*

*29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

*30 And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it.*

*31 For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.*

We can see from this reading what a powerful and vicious enemy we have. Our forefather Adam's fall in sin separated people from God and subjected the human race to the devil. The Savior redeemed people, giving them the opportunity and ability to be freed from the clutches of the evil one and be reunited again with God.

While the devil may have been defeated by our Lord, Jesus Christ, he, however, does not give up the rest of humanity without a determined, relentless fight. And the weapon that he uses so effectively is lying, being called the father of lies by our Savior. We can see how successful he

has been by comprehending the success of his greatest lie. He has convinced modern man that he either does not exist or is at best a harmless bogey-man. Through this deceit, he is able to convince people to do many things according to his will and purpose and against God. And given a chance, he will even mercilessly torture a person during the person's earthly life as we see him torturing the helpless boy in this Gospel reading. He is without doubt a ruthless evil whose purpose of existence is to defy God and steal away from God His highest earthly creation, man.

There is another reason for the great success of the devil. People simply lack faith. Being faithful to God takes great effort. The beauty and pleasures of this world are often too powerful to resist. Only when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances do we remember God. But even then, we are often reluctant to appeal to Him for His help. Why? Because we lack faith. But how can we overcome this crippling spiritual weakness? The father of the tormented boy shows us how. In profoundly beautiful words that bring tears to one's eyes, he cries out to the Savior: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief". What powerful, heartfelt, honest words of prayer! They have the power to open any heart to faith.

While showing us how deadly the devil truly is, the Gospel also reveals the only defense that we people have against him. As the Savior warned the apostles and through them, us, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." This is why we must not only pray, but we must also fast. They are our two spiritual wings that enable us fly to Heaven. But we must continually exercise both of them to complete our flight and reach the lofty heights of the heavenly kingdom.

What a wonderful Mother we have in our Orthodox Church! How deeply She loves us and wants to help us to achieve salvation! What a wonderful reminder and call to action we receive from Her in this Sunday's Gospel reading! May God strengthen all of us with His divine Grace to persevere in our spiritual work of prayer and fasting not only through this time of Great Lent but throughout our entire life in order that we may, without fail, reach the gates of Heaven and be admitted into the eternal blessed life that our God has prepared for those people who love Him.

With Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar