

Matthew 17: 14-23

14. And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15. 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.

16. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17. 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.

18. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

19. Then came the father to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

20. 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.

21. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

22. And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:

23. And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

There are two very important parts in the Gospel reading to which we need to draw our attention. The first one concerns the vital importance that faith plays in the lives of people. This is an old topic but one that is repeated again and again in Scripture because of its importance. The Savior had already given His apostles the spiritual power to do miracles. They had already cast out demons on many occasions. Yet, on this occasion, this spiritual power in them remains dormant, and the demon in the boy does not obey their command.

After the Savior casts out the stubborn evil one, the apostles ask Him why they were unable to do it. He explains that it was because of their disbelief. They had lost that power as they were losing their faith in Him as the Savior. He had begun to repeatedly prepare them for His approaching suffering and death. Not understanding nor wanting to accept that, for which they were being prepared, they began to have doubts that He was in fact the Messiah. It is only unwavering faith that possesses supernatural power. Anyone who has such a faith can be a miracle worker. Through these words, the Savior is encouraging all of His followers, even us in today's world, to hold firmly to faith in our hearts as this is the only way to achieve salvation.

The Savior's explanation also gives us the second very important fact. While we are on earth, we should never forget that we have a greatly formidable enemy who, during our earthly life, will do everything possible to take us away from God and enslave us to Hell. His greatest weapon

against us is lies and deception. In fact, the Savior calls him a liar, the father of lies. Being also extremely crafty, he is able to deceive all people into doing his will. If he is so superior to us, how is it possible to oppose him, to see through his deceptions? The answer is given to us by the Savior in His warning: this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. This is why the Church requires us to pray and fast. When we don't, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the devil's deception. And what better time to remember this if not now, during the Dormition Fast.

In concluding, I want to also remind you that on Tuesday, we will be celebrating the major Church feast holiday, the Transfiguration of the Lord. In fact, the Gospel reading that we are discussing is something that happened right after the Transfiguration and demonstrates with what care the Savior was preparing the apostles for His pending suffering and death. It would be of great benefit to you to read about the Transfiguration in the Gospel before going to church on Tuesday as a way of preparing your heart for the holiday. It is found in St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 17, starting with the first verse. This holiday is also the day we bring to church fruits, especially grapes and apples, to be blessed.

With Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar