

Date: July 15, 2021

Subject: 4TH Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Summer is in full force here. I hope that you are able to enjoy this time as much as I am enjoying my first full summer here near our monastery.

**MATTHEW 8: 5-13**

*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.*

In this Gospel passage, we see the Savior once again coming to the aid of a seriously sick person and healing him. The Savior healed a great number of people. Details of most of these healings are not written down or are just mentioned in passing that Jesus healed people. It is only a few that are recorded in detail. The reason for this is that in cases of the recorded healings, we are able to extract important information that can greatly benefit us in our spiritual life. This is one such healing.

The great lesson that we are given through the account of this healing is found in the Savior's response to the centurion's remark about how Jesus should heal the servant. It was such a profound remark that Jesus was amazed. *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.* It was due to the pagan centurion's faith that Jesus was moved to instantly heal the sick man, and at a great distance.

Let us understand why Jesus found this faith to be so great, that it deserved to be recorded in His Gospel to be never forgotten. The centurion was a high-ranking officer in the Roman Army and a pagan. Romans who had such an exalted position in Roman society held the Hebrew people in utter contempt and regarded their religion to be primitive superstition. It was beneath their arrogant dignity to have anything to do with the Jews, let alone ask them for help.

But this is just what this pagan soldier did. What motivated him? It started out, strangely enough under the circumstances, with love. A centurion had under his command a hundred soldiers.

Roman soldiers were hard and cruel individuals, especially those that had to serve in the distant, forsaken place of the Empire that Palestine was. They had to guard the Jewish people, who hated them and constantly rebelled against them. Therefore, a sickness of a soldier under the command of a Roman officer would never touch his heart. If a sick soldier died, he would be easily and effortlessly replaced. But in this case, the sick man was not even a soldier. He was, amazingly enough, just a simple slave.

But this centurion was different. He had genuine concern for the men under his care. Apparently, normal medical methods could not help the sick man. In order to help him, the centurion, moved by love for his slave, had to humble himself and seek help from a Jew, Jesus. How was it possible for the centurion to humble himself to such a degree? It was faith. Love humbled him and gave him great faith. He went to the Savior, despite not having any reason to believe in Jesus' power to heal.

The profound depth of the man's faith and humility was additionally revealed when Jesus, upon hearing his initial request, agreed to go and heal the sick slave. But the centurion stopped Him: *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst 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.*

So what had just happened? A high-ranking Roman officer from the Roman army, whose soldiers were guarding a nation that they had conquered and were holding in captivity, a nation for which they had no love, only scorn, finds the inner fortitude to approach a Jewish Teacher to ask Him for help. He could have easily sent a contingent of soldiers to take Jesus by force to demand His help. And profoundly influenced both by Jesus' compassion and His divine presence, he instantly recognizes the moral superiority and stature of the Savior to such a degree, that he considers himself to be too inferior to permit Him to come to his house. In addition, he has no doubt that the Savior is able to heal the person that he is healing from a great distance.

By giving this wonderful example of profound faith and humility possessed by a pagan who should not have had such spiritual and moral depth, Jesus was warning the Jews. They should have had such faith and humility, but did not. It is also a stern warning to us to check how deep our humility and faith are.

Sadly, the test of faith that God has sent us during the last two years with what is being called a pandemic may have revealed, or should have revealed, that our faith is very weak. It has revealed that the faith of many Orthodox people from all levels in the Church had fallen so low that they chose loyalty to secular, in many cases God-hating governments, over fidelity to God and the Church.

Churches in which Holy Sacraments give people spiritual **and physical** healing were shuttered and closed. The presence of people in the churches which were permitted to remain open was either banned or greatly reduced. Veneration of icons mandated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council was banned. Confession and reception of Holy Communion, two very powerful spiritual sources of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, were altered. People lost faith in the power of God to

protect them and even feared that the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Savior, as well as Sacraments and Holy Grace-filled items such as icons and holy water, would infect them.

What was most sobering was how the Christian world responded to these what I consider demonic methods employed by the government officials. Who resisted the most in the US were the Protestants. Some defied the government and opened their churches. Some were even arrested. They were also the most active in testing all the restrictions in the court systems. The second most active, were the Catholics. The last to resist was the Orthodox world. That should really worry us.

My dear brothers and sisters, in view of what has happened, what should the Orthodox people do? Each one of us should profoundly search our consciences and identify where we failed. Then should come acceptance of our faults without excuses and deep repentance. After repentance, each one of us, both individually and as a group, needs to correct what is wrong and be ready to react to the next onslaught against our Church and Savior. It will come. But will we be in any condition to respond to it correctly?

Most of all we cannot fear death. Death for a correctly-living Christian is a joyous transfer to Heaven. It is not death that we should fear, but the Judgment that will follow. We should remember that we are not abandoned by God. If we let Him, no matter what we have to face, He will be standing next to us and doing everything necessary to protect us.

With Much Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar