

Date: March 27, 2021

Subject: Second Sunday of Great Lent

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We here in upstate NY can attest that March truly comes in like a lion and leaves like a lamb. We lived through freezing cold temperatures with lots of snow at the beginning of this month. But these last few days have been very spring-like, warm, and pleasant.

**MARK 2: 1-12**

*And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.*

*And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.*

*And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.*

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

*But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,*

*Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?*

*And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?*

*Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?*

*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)*

*I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.*

*And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

Before healing this sick man, Jesus addressed him with the following words: *thy sins be forgiven thee*. He did this to confirm to the scribes who did not believe in Him that He had the power to forgive sins: *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*. This truth is especially relevant for us to remember as we proceed through Great Lent.

We are sinful people. We sin constantly, both consciously and sometimes being unaware that what we are doing is sinful. Our sinful state is a spiritual state of darkness. But God is Light. He is uncreated Light, as explained by St. Gregory Palamas, to whom the third week of Great Lent is dedicated, and revealed by the Savior when He transfigured Himself on the mountain to three of His apostles. Since light and darkness cannot exist together, our sinfulness separates us from God. We can only be in the presence of God if we are forgiven our sins and restored to the condition that mankind was originally created in.

The sobering truth that we must accept is that we, by ourselves, as much as we try, are unable to achieve our restoration. How then can we be saved? The words of the Gospel reveal this to us. The Savior said: *I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved*. The Savior confirms that He is the only one who is able to save us: *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*. Why is it impossible to get to God except through Jesus Christ? Because as He also confirmed: *Without Me you can do nothing*.

The fact that the only way into the Kingdom of God is through the Savior tells us that to be saved, we must have a proper relationship with Him. A proper relationship with Him requires us to love Him. What must we do to show Him that we love Him? He reveals this to us also in the Gospel: *If you love Me, keep my commandments.*

Well, do we keep His commandments? Yes we do, but only partially. In truth, we break them much more often than we keep them. Therefore, we accept being in darkness and allow this darkness to shut out the Light. This is why He began His Mission with the powerful word, **Repent**. Only through our sincere repentance, will He forgive us our sins. And since the word repent means to change, we are required to not simply ask our Lord for forgiveness, but make every honest effort to change, not to return back to our sinful way of life. If we do honestly try, we are showing Him that we truly love Him. Then without any doubt, He will strengthen us in our effort to seek out the light and will forgive any and **all** of our sins, no matter how small or big they are.

The Church knows the overpowering hold that our earthly life has over us. Therefore, She organizes our life for us and designates periods of time for us to pause in our everyday activities and devote more time and real effort to strengthen our soul, spirit, and spiritual life. In doing this, we can more easily identify that darkness has enveloped us and with God's assistance and Grace remove it to allow God's Light into our hearts.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are completing our second week of Great Lent. Have we spent it well? Then let us continue and even, as needed, strengthen our efforts. Or have we been procrastinating? If so, we need to start without delay. Pascha will be here before we realize it, and we certainly don't want to wake up on Pascha and realize to our grief that it is too late. May God bless our efforts to aid us to be changed people, full of light, when we will greet our resurrected Savior with joy.

With Much Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar