



10TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW

August 13

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 17:14-23

[The Disciples Lack Faith]

At that time, a man came up to Jesus and kneeling before him said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting." As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."

THE SERMON

Christ is transfigured on Mount Tabor, and there, the light of His divinity shines. The voice of God the Father speaks, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5). His disciples are astounded to see Him shining brighter than the sun, revealing Himself as the Divine Son of God. Now after His Transfiguration, the Lord



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comes down from the mountain, and a father comes to Him, bringing his son, who suffers from spiritual and physical sickness.

The father kneels and says, "Lord, have mercy on my son," who is an epileptic and suffers terribly, often falling into the fire and the water. Desperate for help, the father said that he brought his son to Jesus' disciples, but they could not heal him. This already shows us that the father had faith in the Lord, for he considered Jesus to be such a great Prophet that the man believed even His disciples would be able to heal his son. The boy suffers greatly from a physical malady of epilepsy, which is a significant challenge. However, as we also see in the story, *physical* illness is also connected with a *spiritual* condition that afflicts the boy.

The father trusts that the disciples will be able to heal the boy, but they are unable. The father, seeing the desperate condition of his son, brings him to Jesus and begs for help. When the Lord learns that the disciples' prayers, along with those of the father's, are insufficient to heal the boy, He sees that as an opportunity to teach about faith, prayer, and *fasting*. Remember that Peter, James, and John have just seen the Lord transfigured on Mount Tabor. However, their faith wavers here. Christ, in His love and mercy, takes the boy's life and health as the priority and heals him first, with nothing more than the words that proceed from His mouth. The boy was cured instantly.

Here we see that there is both a spiritual and a physical element in the boy's illness. We are created in the image of God, and we are a unity of body, soul, and spirit. As human beings, imperfect though we are, we are God's beloved creation. He has created us for joy, peace, and abundant life with Him. Even if we abandon God in our lives, He never abandons us. He loves us, cares for us, and awaits us to return to Him.

The suffering of the boy teaches us a lesson about *our* condition. When we do not remain close to the Lord, our souls and minds begin to suffer from spiritual weakness, which not only affects our hearts and our dispositions, but also can affect even our bodies. When we direct our lives onto paths that take us far from God, we begin to walk close to things that are harmful to us, like the water and the fire in the story. However, when we turn to God, He embraces us, heals us, and renews us.

The disciples come to Jesus privately and ask, "why could we not cast it out?" He tells them that it is because of their little faith. The Lord goes on to make a profound statement, saying that if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, we will move mountains, and nothing will be impossible for us. When Jesus speaks of a faith that moves mountains, He uses hyperbole, which is a teaching device to demonstrate the great power that a little faith has. A seed is one of the smallest things, and a mountain is one of the biggest. Faith makes what seems to be impossible happen. Saint John Chrysostom says, "If you shall ask, where did the Apostles remove mountains! I answer that they did greater things, bringing many dead to life."

Faith is the foundation of our salvation. Healing of this kind focuses on prayer and *fasting* and the significant benefits to our spiritual and physical well-being. Saint Isaac the Syrian says, “*Fasting* is the basis of any virtue and the holy way to God. The fast is . . . the beginning of self-sacrifice . . . the basis of a Christian life, the father of prayer, the originator of chastity and wisdom, the instructor of silence, and the leader to everything good.”

We strengthen our faith through daily prayer, reading of the Scriptures, and spiritual books. Our faith grows by attending Church, *fasting*, participating in the Holy Sacraments, doing good works, and participating in our parishes and their ministries. It might be challenging to trust God fully, especially when we face suffering. This is why, at the end of this passage, Jesus says, “the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” He is teaching His disciples, and He teaches *us*, that even the prospect of carrying our crosses can become a passage unto eternal life and joy if we place our faith in Him.

We often trust ourselves and our own powers and abilities. God knows that, and He is always waiting for us to recognize our limits and ask for His help. He waits for us to put any unsolved problem in His hands and fully trust Him to act for the benefit of our souls. The saying, “Let go and let God,” embodies a great truth. It means that we can draw near to God in faith, and trust that His love and care for us will see us through any challenge and pain.

We can draw close to Him by praying, fasting, and asking for the prayers of Panagia and the Saints. They are with us, and their prayers never fail because they are already with God. Their prayers indeed move mountains, as it were, and they are effective in our lives. All we have to do is ask in faith, then let go and let God. Because of His great love for us, He is able and willing to heal us of our spiritual infirmities when we come to Him and abide in His presence and His love.