



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW

### July 2

### THE GOSPEL READING

#### Matthew 8:5-13

[A Paralyzed Servant Healed]

*At that time, as Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

*When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.*

### THE SERMON

Jesus was traveling through Galilee and encountered a man of faith who is an example for all of us. He was a centurion, which means he was a Roman officer who had one hundred soldiers under his command. Centurions had power and prestige. As a Roman, he



GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

was not part of the Jewish community; he was a foreigner, also called a Gentile (a non-Israelite) at that time. As such, the Jewish people considered him to be an outsider.

The centurion in this passage hears about the Lord Jesus healing people, performing extraordinary miracles, doing good, and preaching repentance and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, when Jesus came to the town where the centurion lived, in Capernaum, not far from where Jesus grew up, he went to Him with faith to ask for help.

The centurion tells Jesus about his paralyzed servant. His concern shows us that he is a merciful commander and has great love for his servant. As Saint John the Theologian tells us, we ought to love one another, because love is *from* God, and whoever does not love does not know God, for God *is* love. Jesus immediately responds with readiness to bless him, offering to come to the centurion's home to heal the servant.

The Lord always answers the cry of those who seek Him, His ears are always open to our prayers. It did not matter that the centurion was not part of the people of Israel, and that he was not able to worship in the Holy Temple. The Lord responds with love and compassion to all who call upon His name with love and faith.

The centurion not only has love, but also shows a depth of faith that amazes even the Lord. He tells the Lord that he is not worthy to receive Him in his own home. He also expresses great faith by telling Jesus only to say the word, and the servant would be healed. The centurion's faith is also informed by discernment. He realized that his own authority as a commander was great over men, and so the Messiah's authority over all things was much greater. Jesus is astonished at his response.

The centurion possesses love, humility, and faith. In humility, he tells the Lord that he is not worthy for the Lord to enter his home. He knew that, at that time, the Jewish people did not enter the homes of Gentiles. He also recognized that he was standing before a man of God and unworthy of hosting Him in his home.

The centurion's humility opens the door of his faith and invites the grace of God. Saint Paisios the Athonite says, "God wants and desires only one thing from us: our humility. He does not need anything else; just to humble ourselves, so He can actually make us partakers of His divine grace, which was granted to us through the mystery of Holy Baptism . . . He is only asking from us to humble ourselves and respond out of gratefulness and appreciation to His love. Thus, divine grace . . . will do everything for us, if we only humble ourselves and allow for it to act."

The centurion has wisdom as well. He understood that, as an army officer with one hundred men under his authority, his commands were quickly obeyed, and his instructions immediately put into practice. As a wise man, he realized that if this were true of himself, it would be even truer for Jesus Christ.

The centurion commanded men, but the Son of God commands the universe. The centurion oversaw his own region, but the Lord rules over everything. The centurion had authority over worldly matters, but the Messiah has power over health and disease, life

and death. The centurion understood all this through his humility and faith.

The Lord replies to his Jewish disciples that not even in Israel He had found such faith. The Lord teaches us that even if the centurion was not part of the Old Testament covenant people of God, as a Gentile, his faith was still greater than what the Lord had found in all of Israel. The Judeans considered him a foreigner, but Jesus embraced him as a member of His Kingdom.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the Holy Forefathers who became friends of God by faith. However, the Lord tells us that many who were not from the ancient people of God would nevertheless enter the Kingdom of God by faith in Christ. This has relevance for us because we all come to the Lord from all corners of the world. We have different cultures, different ethnic backgrounds, different languages. Yet, the Lord receives all of us equally. The only distinction is our faith, how much we desire fellowship with Him.

Like the centurion, we enter the Kingdom by opening our hearts to the Lord in humility, faith, and love. As Saint Augustine of Hippo says, "By declaring himself unworthy, he showed himself worthy; not indeed into whose house, but into whose heart, Christ the Word of God should enter. . . it would have been no great blessedness that Jesus should enter within his walls if He had not already entered into his heart."

The Lord Jesus then says to the centurion that it was done as he had believed. The servant is healed at that very moment. Later, we see that even while the nation of Israel was rejecting the Messiah, delivering Him to be crucified, it was also a centurion who provided a fundamental confession of faith at the foot of the Cross, "truly this Man was the Son of God!"

Jesus is the Savior of all people, regardless of ethnicity. Sometimes we find faith where we do not expect it. All of us can come to Him through faith. It does not matter what our background is, but our faith. The Lord can do all things, and yet what connects us to Him and His authority is our faith. He loves all people, and those who trust in Him, like the centurion, truly open themselves up to receiving the love and grace of God. There is no lack of love and grace with the Lord, no shortcomings, and no one He will not receive and bless. With faith, all things are possible.

Like the centurion's servant, without Christ we are spiritually paralyzed. God unconditionally loves us and wants us to be in communion with Him. This communion occurs when we put our trust in Him, remembering His unwavering love for us. He calls us to be humble, realizing our unworthiness; at the same time, He calls us to never lose hope because God is great, forgiving, and merciful. He hears our prayers, answers them, delivers us from our paralysis, and restores our life. Let us always live out our baptism by putting our faith and trust in the Lover of our souls.