**Matthew 17:14-23**

**Homily by Fr. Terenti Wasielewski**

**August 29, 2021**

Today’s gospel is a miracle that is essentially about faith. Like other miracles in the gospel we encounter a parent who is desperate to relieve their son or daughter of some sort of evil that befell them. The demon was not a little evil man inside his body controlling every move, but rather it was what we know today as epilepsy which as you know, sporadically causes uncontrollable seizures. The demon is really what happens to all of us in this fallen world. Some of us are afflicted with epilepsy, some with mental illness and, some with chronic physical diseases. All these infirmities are not demons, but it is a result of a world that has gone haywire sort of speak and it is our cross to bear. The ancient world thought that the moon made people crazy and we Christians often have blamed demons for such diseases. We must remember the ancients didn’t have science like we do today. Science which is from God, gives us the real answer not ancient superstition.

The father tells us what happens to him when he has these episodes. He often falls into the fire or into the water. No doubt with epileptics this happens. Whenever it is triggered it can be anyplace, in the middle of a street, in a car even at church. It is usually not predictable. The Blessed Theophlactus has an interesting spiritual interpretation to the fire and the water. Fire is anger and lust, jealousy all the rest of the passions by which we are tempted and succumb to on a daily basis. The passions become our addiction and this addiction controls our minds and bodies just like epilepsy. The water also has a significant meaning here. It stifles enthusiasm and desire for holy things. Remember desire is the basic foundation to be good Christians. If we don’t desire to be with Christ, why are we here. Maybe it is our great coffee hours???

When the man tells Christ that the apostles could not cast out the demon Christ gets a little angry, much like a parent scolds their children. He says “unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I put up with you” So who is he directing this to? The apostles, the man, the crowd that surrounded Jesus or to us? The answer is everybody. Everybody is weak. Even though we have been brought up in the faith we remain part of the perverse generation that has yet to turn our lives around. The frustration that Christ exhibits with the apostles and crowd is a drop in the bucket compared to our unbelieving generation.

The major point of the lesson deals with faith of course, but why were the apostles not able to cast out the demon? Basically their faith was not seasoned. They were still neophytes, observing and learning from the master. They have yet to receive the spirit given to them at the time of Pentecost, when as described in the Acts of Apostles were performing miracles all the time. Christ tells them if you have faith as tiny as a mustard seed you can move mountains. We should not interpret this as a literal statement. Rather, the mountain is our hard-hearted soul that is weighed down by all the worldly cares. The mustard seed as tiny as it is, is the faith that will break through that can move that mountain. Remember what happens when the mustard seed is planted. It grows into one of the tallest shrubs in the Middle East. That means when we plant our faith as a mustard seed in good soil, hopefully that plant will grow into a large shrub overtaking our mountainous hard-heartedness. Amen.