**Matthew 9:27-35**

**July 23, 2023**

**Sermon by Fr. Terenti Wasielewski**

Today on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost we read another miracle that Christ performs on blindmen and also someone who was mute. The lesson tells us that these men were possessed with demons and hence these demons afflicted the men with disease of the senses that caused them to lead a life of pain and poverty. We do not know if these men were truly afflicted with demons or if they were part of the fallen world that caused them to have these debilitating illnesses-- what we do know is that physical blindness oftentimes has a deeper serious problem in that there was a spiritual blindness as well.

Unfortunately, we can even see this today, over 2000 years later, we see homeless afflicted with mental illness living in the streets of our cities. The Lord was right when he said “You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me” Ironically, we still have not been able to eradicate mental illness and poverty since the time of Christ, even though we are the richest nation in the world. In fact, poverty increases as the world's population grows. According to the World Bank in 2021, 9.2% or 729 million people in the world live in extreme poverty and in the US 12% or 38 million people live in extreme poverty.

The men in today's gospel represent everyone who is afflicted with poverty throughout history. These infirm men, like the many of the poor today, lived a life without a roof, the comforts of a soft bed no doubt, a life of begging for food, and a life that increased their chances for further disease because of the lack of cleanliness. They had no other recourse but a miracle. You can imagine when they saw Christ performing miracles, they put their last hope in his powers. Today, so often people put their hopes in a miracle with the lottery as a hope to have a comfortable life. We seem to have all these dreams of what we would do if we were the lucky person to hold the billion dollar ticket, but do we put our trust in the Lord and find comfort in the life he has blessed us with. Remember what our Lord said about the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin--in other words, we trust in the Lord that he will provide for us and not be anxious about tomorrow.

The men in the gospel lesson had these same dreams, not with having a billion dollars, but a life free of torment. You can see the same enthusiasm when our Lord asked them “Do you believe that I am able to do this” and they responded not only with a casual “Yes Lord”, but you can only read into it that “Yes Lord” was imperative and filled with complete faith that he could heal them. This is the faith that Christ says can move mountains. It is a faith so intense that our Lord is obligated to heal them.

Remember we can always say Yes Lord, but how genuine is it. The problem with all of us is that we say Yes Lord when something seriously happens to us, or with our family or our friends. All of sudden we turn to the Lord and want him to heal us, but were we there with Him all along? Did we have that same fervor for our Lord when there was no crisis? We need to take what is said here more seriously and apply it to our lives every day, not only when we are in need. On many occasions I have been asked to pray for those who are seriously sick, even called to the home to give the infirm the sacraments and yet the family does not even come to church. How do you expect the sick to recover when the family has no interest in prayer or come to church? The priest is not a magician with a bag of tricks.

If we contrast this miracle with the reading of the gospel on Blindman Sunday during the Easter season, we see a different scenario. In that lesson, Christ takes pity on that blindman. He doesn’t ask him questions about his faith, rather he immediately makes balls out of spittle and places it on his eyes. The blindman regains his sight and when he is asked by the Pharisees who did this, he replies by saying it was a prophet. You see the difference here is that in today’s lesson it is the blindman’s faith that restored their sight, but in the other case it is not the faith the blindman had, rather it is Christ’s action of placing the dirt with spittle on the man’s eyes and the healing power transferred to the blindman. It is only after the blindman receives his sight that his faith is fully restored.

What we can deduce from these two miracles is that it is about faith in the Lord. We do not need anything further. Even Holy Unction is not essential for us to be healed. However, like most of us, we do not have that intense faith, therefore we need the spittle and dirt placed on us in the form of Holy Unction. This is why the church has the sacraments for our healing, because our faith is weak.

When Christ heals the blindmen, he warns them not to tell anyone of this happening. Yet, the blindmen were so overjoyed they went out into the land and showed everyone what had happened. We might think that they were disobeying Christ and that a further disease would afflict them. The Blessed Theophlact says that the Lord was telling them not to boast about the miracle rather proclaim the good works of the Lord. In a previous healing Christ tells them to go home and tell your friends what great things the Lord has done for you..

As with other miracles Christ performs, we see that the Lord uses complete humility. He does not want the glory in what he has done and he does not want boasting with the healed men. This teaches us to exercise humility in all that we are to do as well. Remember our Lord tells us to bring our gifts to the altar in silence, we are not to boast about our fasting and that we are to pray in silence. Christ is in our midst!