

10th Sunday of Pentecost
The Healing of the Demoniac Boy
The "Golden Chain" connecting faith and prayer and fasting.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.¹ Today, Brothers and Sisters, we see a golden chain linking: belief and action, faith and fasting, what we say we believe and what we do. We see two kinds of unbelief today, and two kinds of belief.

The man who had a lunatic son was rebuked by the Lord because of his unbelief:

"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Matthew 17:17)

He was referring to the man, and also the people around him; they all had the first kind of unbelief. This kind of unbelief is when we do not do good.

There was some reason why this boy was possessed by a demon. Demons do not dwell in clean places; Demons live in dirty places. Unbelief is dirty; unbelief is sin. It *could be* because of the boy's sins or the man's sins. The Lord showed that in this case it was because of the man's sins because He rebuked the man.

The Lord heals the boy and the Apostles wonder why they could not cast out the demon. What does the Lord say?

"Because of your unbelief."

This is a different kind of unbelief. It is a lack of internal knowledge and certainty. This knowledge and certainty only comes about by living the Christian life.

Let's look at the Apostles. Look at how they were in the beginning: arguments amongst themselves, fears, questions that seem a little silly in retrospect. Look at them after the resurrection and after Pentecost. They became fearless, wise, and humble. They had changed.

How? By the Lord helping them gain internal belief inside their hearts. This is something that cannot be taken away from us; it is living within us, but if one does not have that kind of belief, then there are things that you cannot do – such as cast out demons.

These are the two kinds of unbelief. There is the unbelief of sin and not doing the commandments, and also the unbelief that is present in all of us until we have lived the Christian life a goodly amount of time.

When I say "live the Christian life", I do not mean just being a Christian for fifty years. I mean living according to the commandments, with your eyes always set towards

¹ This homily was transcribed and edited from one given at [St Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney Texas](#), on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Aug 11/24 2008.

Jerusalem. Then you start to have inside you that inner conviction that no one can take away from you. And with this belief, mountains can be moved (so the Lord says).

I have told you before that this mountain signifies our sins; they are large and heavy and they tend to stay where they are, don't they? But if we have faith, we can say to the mountain of our sins "move" and it will move – we will change.

It takes a great amount of faith to do this. So what does the Lord do? He immediately links faith with prayer and fasting.

He tells us that:

“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. ²¹ Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:20-21)

He was referring not only to the demon in the boys, but also any of the things that make up our mountain. They don't "come out" except by prayer and fasting. They don't come out except by effort. They don't come out except by applying the truth of the Gospel to our daily life.

I told you that there are two kinds of belief. Each can be thought of as opposite to one of the kinds of unbelief.

There is belief in God manifested by following the commandments and struggling to be good.

If any one thinks that being a Christian is easy then they have not begun to be a Christian yet. There are things in you that don't want to live in a Christian way. If you do not recognize these things, they lay in hiding, and direct you like a puppet on a string. But when you recognize those things in yourself – your lack of humility, your arrogance, the fact that you take offense easily, that you have thoughts you should not have, that you are lazy and a time waster, too ambitious, and so many other things that are contrary to the Gospel- then you will understand that it is not so easy to be a Christian.

The first step of course is to recognize that they are there, but then it takes great effort to eradicate them. The Lord says that "this kind" does not come out except by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21, paraphrased) This does not mean that you can fast three days and then everything is better; He is talking about a lifetime of prayer and fasting.

Fasting is not just abstaining from food. Fasting is abstaining from our appetites.

If you have an appetite for praise, fast from it. .

If you have an appetite for rising up in business to the detriment of your other duties, fast from it.

If you have an appetite for unclean thoughts or things fast from them.

If you have an appetite for things that waste time fast from them.

Fasting is abstaining from all of our appetites. Of course, the church directs all of us to fast from food because everyone needs and likes food and therefore fasting from food is an offering to God that everyone can give. But the intent of fasting is not just that we should not eat certain kinds of food at certain times. The intent is that we will not sin. Fasting strengthens us so that we will not sin. If you do not understand this then you have not fasted enough. You will learn by experience that fasting helps us to not sin, but only if this fasting is with effort and purpose and not according to convenience.

Prayer must accompany fasting. Of course the Apostle says that we should pray without ceasing, we should ask God for everything in our lives and give him praise for everything He has given us. We must believe in His providence and see His hand in everything that happens to us. Everything should be done with prayer.

So one kind of belief is the following of the commandments, struggle, prayer, and fasting. But the purpose of our lives is not prayer and fasting. Our purpose is not even prayer. In the Gospel, the Lord tells us that there will come a time when we are not to pray.² This is when we are totally with God; when we are in such a state, we need not ask to be with God! Those who have reached perfection and are gazing at the face of God need not ask God to come, since He is already apprehended by the mind as fully present. We who have not reached perfection must continually ask God to come, and in His coming, He will prepare us. He is ready, but we are not, so we must be prepared to be before the face of God and gaze at Him continually.

The second kind of belief is when one can gaze at the face of God, without shame or fear, but with joy. And with that kind of belief, anything can be done. The Lord tells us that we can move mountains, and exorcize demoniacs; absolutely nothing shall be impossible for us.

We are somewhere in the continuum between the two kinds of belief and unbelief. Let it not be said that we have no belief! If that is the case, then we are far from God. Take note, it is possible for a person who considers himself to be a Christian to have no belief.

Let it be said that we believe, that we struggle to follow the commandments, and that we beg the Lord to help our unbelief. And we know that in struggling to follow the commandments God will help us. He will not abandon us. The good work which has

² "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. (23) And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." (John 16:22-23)

been begun in us He will complete.³ When it is completed, then we will have FULL BELIEF. God will be in our hearts, we will know He is in our hearts, we will feel Him. Nothing can take that away. Until that day, let us struggle with prayer and fasting. Amen.

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³ “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:” (Phillipians 1:6)