

Date: April 22, 2024

Subject: 6th Sunday of Great Lent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Just one week left of Great Lent, after which we will then begin Passion Week, the most intense time of preparation for our celebration of Pascha. May God continue to strengthen us!

**Mark 10: 32-45**

*And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,*

*Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles:*

*And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.*

*And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.*

*And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?*

*They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.*

*But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

*And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

*And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.*

*But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:*

*And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Last week, we heard about a great miracle done by the Savior through which He taught us how to best protect ourselves from the wiles of the demons. For some seemingly strange reason, however, the Savior forbid His apostles from talking about it with other people: *He would not that any man should know it.* One would think that this knowledge was very important for people to have. So why then did the Savior instruct His apostles to keep silent?

St. John Chrysostom explained that the reason for this was that Jesus was en route to Jerusalem to meet His passion, death and resurrection. Despite the more than three

years that He had spent teaching, performing incredible miracles, and confirming the Old Testament prophecies that revealed Him, the Hebrew people still saw Him only as a great prophet, but not the true Savior. This was because Jesus was not the savior that they wanted. They expected their Savior to conquer the world and rule over it together with them as His chosen people. The apostles also persisted in this mistaken view. Therefore, giving such profound spiritual advice at this point in time would have been for naught.

Proof of this failure to correctly believe in Jesus was confirmed by the behavior of two of his closest apostles, the brothers John and James. Jesus tells the apostles the terrible things that awaited Him in Jerusalem. One would think that this account would profoundly affect them. But it did not. All that they could think of was how to secure for themselves the best positions in the Savior's kingdom ruling over the world. The other apostles' displeasure about the brothers' attempt revealed that they too had the same mistaken understanding.

Jesus responded by telling them and us something that is most important for us to know and fulfill:

*Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

What a radical and strange concept to those in the world! The world teaches us instead that our first concerns should be about what *we* need or want. Only after these are satisfied can we start thinking about other people and their needs and wants. But that is not what the Savior teaches. This is not the way to express love. True love is self-sacrificial and requires us to put the concerns of other people ahead of our own, and even to treat their concerns as if they are our own. If we do this, we are fulfilling the second of the two commandments that Christ gives on love. Furthermore, our fulfilling this commandment directs us to fulfill the first one also, the commandment on how to show God that we love Him. As the apostle of love, St John the Theologian stresses in his letters that a person is unable to truly love God if he does not love his neighbor.

My dear brothers and sisters, how can we remain indifferent and not profoundly moved when we read in this Gospel what our Savior had to accept and endure in order to complete His divine mission to save people? He is the almighty God Who created us out of His love, wanting to share this love with others. He is the perfect man who never sinned, and as a man, He gave Himself up as a sacrifice for all the sins of all people, the very people who rejected Him through every sin voluntarily perpetrated by them. We claim to love Him and still repeatedly drive new nails into His Body, hanging on the cross. And despite all of this, He still loves us, still wants to save us, still desires to share with us a blessed eternity.

Understanding all of this, how is it possible for us to *not* love Him, truly love Him? We can and should! Therefore, for starters, let us in the next two weeks profoundly repent

before Him. Let us walk with Him without fear, as He carries His cross to the place where He will die, grieving as we witness the abuse, the mocking, and the demonic joy of His deceived enemies, preparing a mansion for themselves in the lowest regions of Hell. Let us stand in support of His Divine Mother standing in deep grief at the cross. Let us help Joseph and Nicodemus take down His body for burial. And then with profound joy, let us greet Him as He exits the tomb, having resurrected Himself on the third day.

After all of this, let us, going forward, use the grace that He freely gives us to strive to live as righteously as we can. Yes, we will, at times, fall. In fact, we will fall and fall again and again. Only our death will stop us from falling. But by repenting each time, God, seeing our love for Him in our hearts, will wash us clean, again and again. Just imagine the powerful joy that will then be ours forever! We will live with our God and Creator in the divine mansions that were prepared by Him to share with those who truly love Him.

With Much Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar