

Date: April 16, 2024

Subject: 5th Sunday of Great Lent

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

On Monday, we began the fifth week of Great Lent. This means that Pascha is a short three weeks away. May God strengthen our spiritual work during these weeks to allow us to meet the resurrected Savior, having worthily prepared ourselves.

**MARK 9: 17-31**

*And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;*

*And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.*

*He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

*And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

*And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.*

*And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

*Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

*When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

*And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.*

*But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

*And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?*

*And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it.*

*For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.*

When we read about the horrendous suffering that the demon inflicted on the helpless child, we can only pause in fearful awe. We ask ourselves how can demons have such hatred and destructive power over people? The answer to this question is that such power is possible, but only in situations where God is missing. When does this happen? Whenever a sin is committed.

Any sin is a rejection of a God's commandment. Through his rejection of God's commandments, the sinner is also rejecting God. Having a complete aversion to sin and respect for our free will, God steps away whenever a person sins, resulting in a spiritual emptiness. This emptiness is instantly filled by another force, a demonic one, the devil. And he is then free to do whatever he wants to do with the sinner.

What we see in this Gospel passage is a most severe example of how much the devil hates people and relishes hurting them. However, this kind of possession, his moving into the sinner's body and controlling from within, is not the most common form of the devil's control over people. He, being a most devious spirit, is able to control people from outside of their body. Through deceit, he is able to fool people into obeying him and doing his will. And often being unaware of the evil that they are committing, they pave their own way to perdition. This is the most common form of control that the demon exercises over people.

Why are people so susceptible? After all, we are created in the image and likeness of God and have an innate need for a relationship with our Creator. However, we are also born with an attraction to sin, and even after baptism, which gives us grace to resist sinning, we still fall prey to, and believe in, the false promises of pleasure that sins offer us. We choose to ignore the warnings given to us by the voice of God through our conscience, and we submit to sin. The pleasure, however, is short-lived and passes away quickly, being just as quickly replaced with intense bitterness. And that leads us to want the pleasure again, and foolishly we submit to this vicious cycle again and again. Before long, we become addicted and cannot stop.

Despite the fact that we reject God through our sinning, He still wants us. He reaches out to us in different ways to call us to repentance. An example of such a call is to inflict a serious illness on us. If we understand what God is doing and respond, He reveals the way that we can free ourselves. *This kind can come forth by nothing, but by **prayer and fasting**.*

How are we freed from the devil through prayer and fasting? These remedy the damage that we allow sin to inflict on the two basic parts of us. We are created in two parts, a material body and a spiritual soul. We sin bodily, and we sin spiritually. We are healed in our bodies through fasting. And we are healed spiritually through prayer. Using both of these correctly is the remedy to free us from the power and damage of sin. These are the two wings that we need to enable us to fly and reach Heaven.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we all sin. There is no one who does not. However, unless we free ourselves from sin, we will face an eternity that is most bleak. But there is always hope. As discussed above, we can free ourselves, but only by using these two remedies. Therefore, we can see that Great Lent is not a burden, as it is so often seems to us. It is God leading us away from the death of sin and onto the path of life—to Heaven. Therefore, let us follow Him faithfully, with renewed spirit and effort.

With Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar