

# Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel Readings of the Days of the Great Lent by Father Louka Sidarous (2)

## Monday of the First Week of Lent

Mark 9:33-50

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

38 Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."

39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against [us is on [our side. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 44 where 'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'

45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 46 where 'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'

47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into [j]hell fire— 48 where 'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'

49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

Who is greatest?

This is purely a selfish human question. The question crossed the disciples' mind, but for the world it is a staple and rule of life that dominates people's minds all over the world. To that extent, the whole world races towards this notion of "who is the greatest". On the contrary, Christ - the Lord of humility

Who emptied Himself in meekness and is lowly in heart - opens the inner vision and converts the mindset of man. Without Christ a person cannot and would not seek to be humble.

Christ has granted us this grace when He created us anew. In this new creation we became like the child whom Christ embraced with love. Hence the mind of the child is what our inner part should emulate. A child is looked upon by everyone with love and tenderness. In Christ we may achieve this state of beloved childhood.

When we live as an innocent child many of the ailments that have afflicted the fallen human nature can be healed. These ailments include the seeking to be recognized and praised by others, wanting to take the first place, love of having possessions, vainglory, and every trait that stems from pride and boasting over others.

What a beautiful stature (to be like a child) and how joyful are the days when a person lives as an innocent and beloved child, pampered by God and accepted by all people.

When you relinquish your desires for what is worldly and willingly give up your pride and ego, you are then embarking on the days of joy of the fast. These days are counted as heaven-on-earth. When you start the first day of the fast with the stature of childhood and innocence, imagine what could be achieved when the fast is completed?! Indeed, the first step to perfection is humility. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" is the first of the beatitudes.

The Lord set up this child in the midst of the pure apostles, as if he is setting him in the midst of the church so that they may behold him as a perpetual example and demonstration. Does a day pass when we do not see a child in the church? It is an easy and accessible way of visual demonstration. Every time I behold a child, I ought to remember the words of the Lord and the path paved by Christ for us. Peter recalled the words of the Lord when the cock crowed. His bowels were moved with repentance and his tears burst like a fountain.

+ "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." This is what the zealous disciple, St John the son of thunder, said. The Lord replied, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. "

The Lord has many disciples and a multitude of followers. Some we know and some we do not know. We should accept a miracle, or a power performed in the name of Jesus, as long as it is not a lie or deceit even if done by someone we do not know. The core is the sound faith in the person of Christ. Those who sought to increase the sufferings of St Paul the apostle and his chains, went out to preach Jesus so the rulers would blame Paul and increase their persecution. When St Paul the apostle heard about that he rejoiced that the name of Jesus was being preached, whether in truth or for an ulterior motive. In either case, the name of Jesus the son of the living God was being preached with the words of the true faith and sound dogma in Christ Jesus.

+ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—

This is the strict rule of fasting. It is a rule against the delinquency of the flesh and its stumbling which could lead to the destruction of the whole life. These could drag the whole person to perish. Thus, the spiritual struggle ought to be so strict and firm.

What if the will of a person weakens?

What if a person let his lusts and desire loose?

What if sin reigned again on the entire person?

Then, fasting becomes the beginning of healing when the cross and its sacrifice become portrayed before a person's eyes. When we confess our sins and admit our inability to control the eye, the hand and the foot, fasting and prayer become the power, in the name of Jesus Christ, that casts out Satan – who is a murderer from the beginning. Jn. 8:44.

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