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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America - Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Matthew



July 5, 2020

Kimisis Tis Theotokou Greek Orthodox Church

Poughkeepsie, NY

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am delighted to be with the Kimisis community of Poughkeepsie this morning, and experience your faith and your devotion as we continue to reopen our churches. We do so still exercising great caution and abundant concern for the well being of our faithful.

With all of the threats to our health, our economy, our way of life, our faith has been sorely tested. There are some for whom faith cannot stand up to reason and science, while there are others for whom faith seems almost like an automatic process that requires no thinking at all.

In between both extremes, we find one of the greatest examples of faith in the New

Testament: the Roman Centurion of Capernaum. Here was a member of the occupying army that was hated by the Jewish populace. Here was a leader – a centurion – not only of soldiers but of the community which he controlled. And yet he went to Jesus, to the rabbi about whom he had heard so many stories. He calls Him “Κύριος,” but we should not think that this Roman acknowledged Jesus as *the* Lord. More than likely, it should be translated as “Sir,” a token of high respect, especially for a Roman officer to a Jewish rabbi.

The centurion asks the Lord for his servant; he does not ask for himself. This is a sign of the condition of his spiritual heart. His concern is for another more than for himself. We can all learn a lesson from this Roman in these days of the pandemic. Are we thinking only of ourselves and our comfortable zones of belief? Or can we think about the benefit of others, whether they are dear to us or not?

When our Lord Jesus Christ responds, “I will come and heal him,”^[*] what an incredible sight this must have been to the crowd that was standing there. Here was an oppressor beseeching the help of the oppressed! Yet our Lord did not hesitate, for he knew the heart of this oppressor, and that despite his warlike demeanor there was a quality of mercy in the Centurion’s soul.

But this remarkable Roman will not have it. He will not accept the Lord Jesus into his home. He protests, not out of prejudice against the Jews, but out of knowledge and humility. He says:

Κύριε, οὐκ εἰμὶ ἱκανὸς ἵνα μου ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃς ...

Sir, I am not sufficient that you should enter under my roof...^[†]

And he continues:

But only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, “Go,” and he goes, and to another, “Come,” and he comes, and to my slave, “Do this,” and he does it.^[‡]

Behold this marvelous and truly miraculous humility and understanding! First he acknowledges his unworthiness to receive the Lord in his home. But he goes further. He possesses an understanding of authority and recognizes true authority in the Christ. He does not need to see the healing with his own eyes, because he has already seen in the face of the Lord the power and love of God.

My beloved friends, there is more than one miracle in today's reading from the Holy Gospel, and I dare say the miracle in the heart of the Centurion is more powerful than the physical healing of the servant.

So much so, that in the life of the Church, we use his words to our Lord in one of the pre-Communion prayers of the divine Chrysostom:

Κύριε ὁ Θεός μου, οἶδα, ὅτι οὐκ εἰμὶ ἄξιος, οὐδὲ ἱκανός, ἵνα μου ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃς τοῦ οἴκου τῆς ψυχῆς....

O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy, nor sufficient that you should enter under the roof of the house of my soul....[\[S\]](#)

This is the way to approach Holy Communion! Like the Centurion, with a heart transformed by the knowledge and love of God. The physical miracle of the transformation of the Gifts of Bread and Wine is one thing, but even this is not of itself the purpose of the Holy Eucharist.

The transformation that counts unto eternity is the change in our hearts and minds, the transfiguration of our souls into loving, forgiving, compassionate human beings who reflect the image and glory of God in our lives.

In a time when we have all been challenged in our faith to come to terms with how to practice our Orthodoxy in this time of the pandemic, the faith of the Centurion shows us the way.

Think of others first.

Be humble before God.

Recognize the purpose of God's transformative power.

And reverence deeply God's authority without judgment or prejudice.

If we can practice our faith like this nameless Roman Centurion, perhaps we will one day hear what our Lord said of him in amazement to His own followers and disciples:

Amen I say to you: not in Israel have I found such faith! I tell you that many will come from East and West and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven![\[**\]](#)

May it be so for all of us at the end of our days. May we be counted worthy to feast with these Righteous in the Kingdom of God through the intercessions of the Holy

Theotokos and all the Saints. Amen.

[\[*\]](#) Matthew 8:7.

[\[†\]](#) Matthew 8:8.

[\[‡\]](#) Matthew 8:8,9.

[\[§\]](#) Third Communion Prayer, of John Chrysostom.

[\[**\]](#) Matthew 8:10,11.

[Source](#)