

“WITHOUT LOVE TO THE SUFFERING PEOPLE WE CANNOT LOVE GOD” by His Eminence Metropolitan Serafim of the Holy Orthodox Archbishopric of Zimbabwe



Today's Gospel extract (Mathew 8, 5-13) refers to the great virtue of faith in God, which however must always be accompanied by the other great virtues which must characterize the life of the virtuous person, as are the virtues of humanity and indiscriminate love towards every person who is in need of our help.

The entire attitude of the Roman officer towards Christ demonstrates he who has these virtues is near to Christ. Therefore in his dialogue with Christ the Roman centurion confesses with much humbleness "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof" (Matthew 8:8). One would expect usually, that the Roman centurion as a functionary of the sovereign occupational troops in Capernaum but also due to the Roman arrogance and his profession, to show contempt with a feeling of superiority.

To understand the greatness of the centurion's deed, we must bear in mind that in that time, servants from a social perspective were not considered as people. It seems that the only exception, to this social injustice was the Roman centurion, who with a lot of love, sees his servant as his fellow human being whom he needs to help, similar to the way that he would react in helping one of his parents or one of his children or one of his relations.

In the dialogue between Christ and the Roman centurion, the centurion proves that he is an exceptional person who procures a solitary admiration because according to Christ's word "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Matthew 8:10).

In this instance, the miracle is the fruit of faith of the person who finds himself in need and asks Christ to intervene so that he might be freed even though the benefit of the miracle refers to someone else other than the person who asks for it.

This instance shows the great worthiness of our prayer for the persons that we love. This is why our prayer for others is necessary; it is an expression of our faith in Christ, that God's strength is always greater than the strength of evil and people's malice.

When we say we believe in someone, it means that we trust him. Hence, in the instance of the centurion, the greatness of his faith in Jesus Christ is evident by the extent of his trust in the entity of Christ, where he believes steadfastly that not only the presence of Christ close to the sick servant will bring about his cure, but also that even his mere word will cure him. This is why Christ amazed at the great extent of his faith says to him: "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would" (Matthew 8:13) and truly from that moment, according to the testament of the Evangelist Matthew, his paralysed servant was healed.

The centurion's faith is created by his love towards his fellow human being who in this particular instance is expressed by his direct interest for the cure of his servant, who even though he is a servant, nevertheless does not cease to be a creation in the image of God, a child of God, and for this reason our brother.

Amongst the other qualities, which distinguished the Roman centurion, was his humble conviction, he was a person of humility. Furthermore, that which drives him to the confession of his unworthiness to offer Christ hospitality in his house is his humble moral.

The centurion's confession does not happen of course due to the unsuitability of his

house but because he is conscious of his own personal unworthiness in relation to the entity of Jesus Christ and the most important issue is that he recognizes and confesses and makes known his unworthiness publicly.

It is well known from common experience that when something bad happens to us, an illness, an accident, some adversity we are ready to announce publicly and actually our smallness and our unworthiness. Exactly as the Roman centurion did and he was convicted.

What do we do in such instances? Do we remain static on the words spoken or do we go forward in a various works, that is, do we do that which we are familiar with and we know is right and good or do we simply have in the beginning the good intention and enthusiasm and then do nothing that can change our life and bring us closer to God. Most of the time we remain on the spoken word until we once again fall victims to folly.

This is why it is an honour and glory for those who remain faithful and consistent to the end, not only because like this they exemplify the virtues of the Roman centurion, but also because this is how they actually express their course towards Repentance which the word of God consistently asks as for so that we can return to the kingdom of heaven "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand".

But few go in this direction, the select few, because usually the excess values that we give to materialism, economic comfort, worldly tributes, the glory of the world and sinful passions, without us being fully conscious of it provide us with a feeling of superiority over other people, whom we also consider to be weaker than us in all spheres.

Seemingly, this feeling satisfies us because it feeds us with calmness and we feel comfortable and superior. In reality however, we live in self-delusion, which is expressed with errors in our horizons. This self-delusion, even later on in life, is understood by the various arising issues of our life when we make mistakes and battle to understand that they were made by us. The problems however that surrounds us are a testament constantly of the opposite. We create this self-delusion, what we sow we reap. We create the problems, which scourge our society, either with our participation in their creation or with our acceptance of the social injustices, which we allow the unlawful, the unjust, the exploiters and the deceivers to perpetuate.

One can avoid all these issues only if one has a humble moral, which is in accordance to the Christian perspective and the spiritual life. A person who lives

spiritually does not forget his boundaries, his mistakes or his strength with God's help, to face issues with the best powerful solutions or simultaneously with the least painful solutions.

For this reason no virtue can have a worthy content without humility. All the fruits of spiritual life like love, truth, faith, prayer, our participation in the mystical life of the Church, lose their meaning when they are not based on humble convictions, because from the moment a virtue becomes, "for appearance sake towards people" and serves hypocrisy and the egoistical and personal projection, it ceases to have a Christian content and as a result a spiritual motive which will lead us to salvation through Christ.

The person who is humble empties himself of his egoistical elements and in this way he faces his self-centredness decisively and victoriously. Then, the spiritual person with the powerful weapon of humble moral destroys walls, which separate him from his contact with society, people and with God.

In this way the person who struggles escapes the motive of his isolation, which ceases to absolutely consume him within the space that he lives. He is conscious of his horizons; he does not treat his fellow human beings whom he encounters in his sphere with contempt because he knows that he needs them not so much because he needs assistance from them but for him to declare his love for them because only from our love towards every person are we able to arrive at God's path of love.

This is exactly what the Roman centurion does. From his love towards his servant, he arrived at Christ's love. This is why with our love towards others we are changed to architects of society who try hard with their social contribution to change a world into the kingdom of God.

The person who moves in this direction emulates Christ, he becomes a true Christian, because a Christian is not simply someone who happened to be baptized at a young age, but he who confirms it from within the consequences of his life to live according to the Godly commandments of Christ, ready to sacrifice his life to protect the human rights of all those people who are treated unjustly and who suffer.

That's why saint Paul today in his letter to the Galatians call us "carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6,2).

[Source](#)