

What we want to talk about this week is the Issue of Faith.

Our Lord Jesus Christ issued a wonderful challenge to all of Mankind, it's like he actually taunts us and mocks us for how much faith we have – or is that how little our faith actually is.

In Matt 17:20 Jesus speaks

“For assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

So what is this mustard seed, why this seed and not any other?

- This seed is the smallest seed of all seeds, but when it grows it the greatest and largest of all trees in the world.
- This is Christ's Challenge to us today! Have faith as small as this seed and you will do wonders, even move mountains!

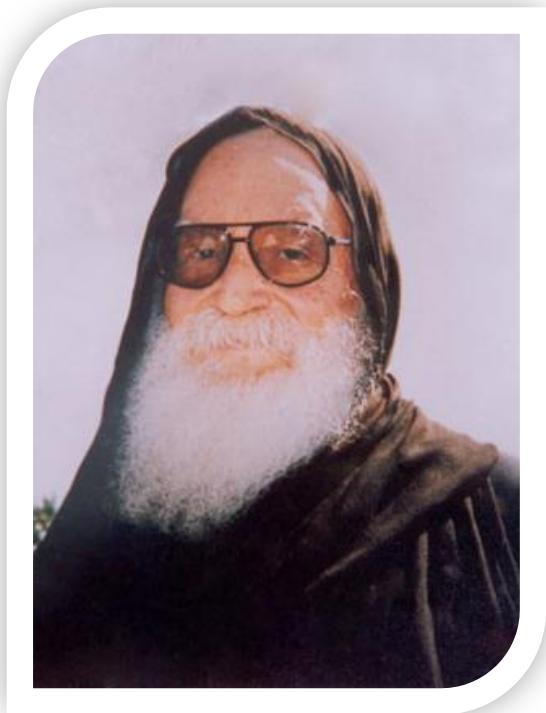
So what are the enemies of faith, what stops us from getting this faith which is as small as a mustard seed!

I love Fr. Matthew the Poor who was the abbot of St Macarius' monastery in Egypt till he reposed last year!

- I encourage you to read his books of which 3 have been translated
 - The Orthodox Prayer Life
 - The Communion of Love
 - The Titles of Christ.

What we want to focus on today is the issue that he deals with In the Orthodox Prayer life in regards to the “Enemies of Faith”.

For the notes on this website, I have included directly what he has written from his book! This will be a better read than what we have briefly discussed in class.



Faith has three enemies: reliance on natural reason, fear, and skepticism.

1. RELIANCE ON EMPIRICAL REASON

Reliance on empirical reason hampers the work of faith and frustrates the acceptance of its effectiveness, for it is well known in nature that man cannot walk on the sea or move mountains or rebuke the wind and waves or raise the dead. As for faith, it pays no regard to nature and its laws. Faith can do all this and even more. For this reason, if man depends entirely on his empirical reasoning, his faith will be paralyzed: “Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has

been dead four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’” (Jn 11.39, 40)?

Natural reason and calculation foster fear, and fear leaves no room for faith. It is common knowledge, for example, that vipers and scorpions are noxious. The look of them strikes terror into the heart. But faith has transcendent vision and can look upon them as blessed creatures created by God. Faith stands fearless before them: “Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you” (Lk 10. 19). Science proves that poison is deadly, but faith does not know this: “They will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them” (Mk 16.18).



We can thus see that scientific reason constrains the work of faith and hinders its consummation.

2. FEAR.

Fear is a proof that man still longs to defend his own ego and pities himself. It is a symptom of self-love and stands in opposition to faith. Fear weakens faith and deprives man of its fruits.

Faith itself is an exodus from man's ego and a denial to self, an exodus urged by man's love for God and for other people. A true believer is one who has surrendered his soul and body to God. Fearing nothing at all, he puts all his trust in God's faithful promises: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (Jn 11.25). It is in this spirit that Abraham offered his son: "He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead" (Heb 11.19). In this spirit also did the three young men, undaunted, enter into the fiery furnace. They were sure that God would save them from its flames: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God who we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king" (Dan 3.16, 17). When thrown into the den of lions, Daniel trusted in his God: "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God" (Dan 6.23).



In order to grasp the danger of fear and the harm it inflicts on our spiritual life, we should ponder this verse: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death" (Rev 21.8).

You might be surprised to see the cowardly placed at the head of this sinister list. The reason for this is that fear is the element that causes our fall into the rest of all these sins.

3. SKEPTICISM.

It may seem that doubt is a mild form of fear. However, the converse is true. Fear is but a symptom of an imperfect knowledge, while doubt is sin directly aimed against God: doubt is disbelief in God's promises. Doubt fosters fear. Doubt is the first weakening of trust in God, but it gives rise to fear, the farthest point away from God. When Peter saw how violent the wind was, he employed his powers of assessment and concluded that he could go no further.

He surrendered to fear and began to sink. He doubted the Lord's command. This is what the Lord discloses to him in clear terms. "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me'. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'O man of little faith, why did you doubt'" (Mt 14.28-31)?



In the same way, St. James the Apostle says in clear terms that if doubt tarnishes our petitions, we cannot reap any fruit from our struggle: "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord"

(Jas 1.6, 7). "Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken

up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours" (Mk 11.23, 24).

Persistence in prayer and worship is one of the signs of effective faith. If faith represents the columns on which the temple of spiritual life stands, perseverance represents the stones by which the whole edifice is constructed.

Extracted from "The Orthodox Prayer Life" By Matthew the Poor

So what do we do to overcome this!

Today's the 5th Week of Lent and we are blessed with the Reading of the Paralytic man who was paralysed for 38 Years.

You can read this Gospel Below – John 5:1-18

*After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "**Do you want to be made well?**"*

The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

*Jesus said to him, "**Rise, take up your bed and walk.**" And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.*

And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, "Take up your bed and walk."

*Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "**See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.**"*

The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God

I have highlighted three very important things I want you to take from This lesson.

To strengthen your faith you need to acknowledge Jesus' question which he asks everyone before he heals, even in the Bible!

DO you want to be made well?

Some may choose not to, while others will! Christ will never force you, you have 2 by yourself.

The 2nd command of our lord was to "Rise, take up your bed and walk

What does this mean.

When you acknowledge you need healing, you must get up and get ready for action, go and seek a physician! Who for us is Christ!

Secondly, we must take up our bed! This is removing all things that are taking us away from God, our evil lifestyle, our music, our shocking internet sites, drugs and alcohol etc.

You can be made well, if you do not remove the evil around you!

I cannot heal someone from poison if he keeps on drinking it.

Then our Lord commands we must walk.

That is the path of struggle!

Fr Bishoy Kamal says, Saints became Great not because they didn't sin, but because they struggled against Sin.

Even if we fall we must have faith to struggle against sin.

Then finally Jesus gives us a stark warning, if we continue in the path of sin, a worse thing will come upon us?

Personally I think Jesus was referring to death in sin, when we die in sin, will we see the heavenly Jerusalem? I do not think so!

Conclusion

So my final message for today is, let us not be confronted by the feeling that faith is impossible to get and maintain.

You are now aware of the Enemies of Faith

The Enemies of Faith we said are considered Sins

To Overcome Sin we must follow the commands of Christ to the paralysed man.

God Bless