

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen! Christ Is in our midst! He is and always shall be!

The story in this morning's Gospel takes place right after the Transfiguration of our Lord on Mt. Tabor. Jesus and his disciples Peter, James and John had just come down from the mountain. As they approached the bottom of the mountain, they found a tumultuous crowd of people with his disciples. Out of the crowd a man came with his son. He fell on his knees before Jesus and said "Lord, have mercy on my son for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not heal him."

The word, which is often today is translated as epileptic, is also sometimes translated as lunatic. In those days an epileptic was considered to be someone possessed by a demon who would afflict its victims at the time of full moons.

The man had taken his son to Jesus for healing. Unfortunately, Jesus was still on the mountain where he had been transfigured. The apostles tried to heal the boy, since they had healed many others. They were able to not only heal someone, but also cast out demons. This should not have been a problem for them. For some reason, they were unable to heal the boy. The apostles had started arguing among themselves as to why they couldn't cast out the demon. Perhaps they had lost the Holy Spirit which gave them the ability to heal the sick and cast out demons.

While they were arguing, Jesus had come down the mountain and had come into sight. The father, seeing Jesus, took his son directly to Jesus and begged him for help. Jesus said to the father and to the all the people gathered "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" Perhaps Jesus was getting frustrated, since he knew that he soon would be crucified, and his apostles still showed little faith. He then cast out the demon and healed the boy.

After Jesus and the apostles had left the crowd and gone to be by themselves the apostles asked him why they could not cast out the demon. His response was "Because you have no faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will

move; and nothing will be impossible to you. This kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting.”

Jesus was trying to teach the apostle that they must have faith in order to do the works which he would soon have them doing throughout the whole world. They had been casting out demons and healing the sick in Israel, but soon he would be crucified and would rise from the dead and that they would be sent to do his work not just in Israel but to all of the nations of the gentiles. They must have faith!

Believing in God is different from believing God. To believe God is to regard his promises to us as sure and true, but to believe in him is to have a right understanding of him. Both are necessary for us. We must speak correctly in both respects, so that people with correct understanding can be confident that we are faithful before the God to whom our faith is directed and that, being faithful, we shall be justified by Him.

In Genesis, we read that "Abraham believed God", "and it was counted to Him for righteousness". Why was Abraham counted as righteous because he believed? God had promised Abraham that if he worships Him as his only God and be obedient to him that he would be the father of many nations. That he would have more heirs than the number of stars in the sky. In fact, kings would come from his blood line.

Abraham had received a promise from God that in his son Isaac all the tribes of Israel would be blessed. Then he was commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac, through whom alone the promise could be fulfilled. Without being conflicted Abraham, hastened on his way to become his son's murderer while at the same time regarding the promise concerning his son as infallibly sure.

Do you see what sort of faith brings justification? But Christ also promised us that we would inherit eternal life, pleasure, glory and the kingdom, while then He also commanded us to be poor, to fast, to live in lowliness and affliction, to be ready to die and to crucify ourselves together with our passions and desires. If therefore we eagerly do these things while at the same time believing God's promise to us, then we shall have truly believed God in the same way that Abraham had, and it will be counted also to us as righteousness.

If because of God's commandments, we are chaste, righteous, humble, and patiently submit to every kind of evil doing and share our possessions, if we submit our bodies to hardship through fasting and vigils, if, in a word, we crucify ourselves together with our passions and desires, this is not just proof that we truly believe Christ's promises, but it also, obliges God to give us in return eternal and incorruptible life and pleasure, glory and the kingdom, St. Gregory Palamas tells us.

Christ looked at His disciples and said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and when they shall exclude and mock you, and throw out your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for their fathers did the same thing to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for their fathers did the same thing to the false prophets.

How is it credible that someone who says that they believe God if he does not aspire to what the Lord tells us is blessed. Instead they aspire to what God tells us is wretched? "Show me", James writes, "your faith by your works." And, "Who is a wise man? Let him show out of good conduct his works".

The fact that we truly believe God, that we understand that His promises and warnings to us are true and sure, even though they have not yet happened, is shown by our good works and by our keeping His commandments.

But what proof is there that we have a right belief in God, that we have a trustworthy and devout understanding of Him? It is that we confess the same faith as our God-bearing Fathers.

Sincerely believing God provokes opposition not only from the evil one, but also from people in the grip of passions who lure others and drag them down with themselves into wicked pleasures.

Evil passions and godlessness not only open the door to one another, they are also similar. Adam was given authority by God to eat from every tree in paradise, but he was not satisfied with them all. Once he had been convinced by the tempting of the serpent, the originator of evil, he ate from that one tree which he had been commanded not to touch.

In the same way God sets before us all His riches and truly beneficial gifts to share if we wish, in accordance with the words of St. Maximus the Confessor,

"The person who has been deified by grace will be in every respect as God is, except for His very essence."

We have received power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Without difficulty, we can crush all the tricks and snares he devises against living a holy life. And when we have openly gained the victory over the evil one, in every respect, we shall attain to heavenly and incorruptible crowns of righteousness in Christ Himself, to the impartial Judge who gives to each his due.

Faith without works is dead and chaotic, and works without faith are empty and useless. We must let our works show our faith in God. Just as Abraham did, we to must be willing to do whatever God asks us to do.

Many things happen in our life which try to tear us away from God. We are all given struggles in this life. But as our Lord told us, those who wish to follow after him must deny himself and take up his cross and follow him.

To follow Jesus is to do the works that he calls us to do, for Faith without works is dead and chaotic, and works without faith are empty and useless.

My spiritual father always asks me during confession, "Do you trust God". I pray that I and all of you can always say yes to this question. Since without this trust in God, there is no hope. We must have total faith in God, not just 50%, 75% or even 95%. The more we trust God and have faith the greater the size of the mountain that we need to move will be.

God has given us gifts which we must be willing to use to do His work. Knowing that God is with us at all times will give us the strength to do his work. As our Lord told

us in the gospel this morning, we must pray and fast so that we can do his work and cast out the demons that attempt to destroy us and the world around.

The more we use these gifts the more God will pour fourth his grace upon us. If you think you have no gifts, then pray to God to reveal them to you. He will hear your prayer and guide you as to how to use your gifts. Do not be afraid to ask, for he'll never give you a cross that is too heavy for you to carry.

And even when times are at the hardest and most difficult God is with us and will carry the cross for us.

At Great Compline during Great Lent we sing: "O Lord of hosts, be with us, for we have none other help in times of sorrow but Thee."

God is there for us and will always be there, even if we turn our back on Him. Sadly, if we do not repent of turning our back on Him, there is no hope of salvation. God will not force us to serve Him.

Have Faith in God and Trust God in all things.