



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, the Church seeks to show us through the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas & the Gospel of the Healing of the Paralytic, how mankind may achieve *theosis* by demonstrating effort.

St. Gregory Palamas is most famous for his defense of Hesychasm, a monastic practice of still, unceasing prayer which can allow a person to encounter the Uncreated Light of God: the same that Moses witnessed in the Burning Bush, and the light the Disciples saw during our Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. A Priest named Barlaam incorrectly viewed Hesychasm as a heresy, believing it spoke of a visible and invisible God. However, St. Gregory meant that while man could never truly experience God's *essence* in this life, Hesychasts could experience God's *energies*; and in knowing God's energies we could have spiritual knowledge of God. What Hesychasm requires, is a very serious demonstration of effort, for this kind of Grace comes only to those who put in the work to seek it.

We can see from this week's Gospel, how our Lord looks at this hard work. The Paralytic has four dear friends who care about him so much, that they go out of their way to help him meet Jesus, even though the Gospel tells us, *"So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door..."* (Mark 2:2) How many, seeing a crowded house, holding up our friend's bed, would feel that bringing him through would be too difficult? However, these men wish to see their friend made well and will not be discouraged. So great is their faith that *"...they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay"* (Mark 2:4) They understand Jesus who says, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."* (Matthew 7:7). Seeing the roof of the home being taken apart, and the Paralytic lowered, Jesus also does something bold.

Ordinarily, out of respect for free will, Christ would ask those coming before Him, "Do you wish to receive your sight?" or "What do you want me to do for you?" In the case of the Paralytic, instead, He says, *"My son, your sins are forgiven."* (Mark 2:5). Naturally, this causes a scandal, for the Pharisees present, think, *"Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mark 2:7) Christ of course, knows the hardness of their hearts, and so He replies, *"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic— I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home. And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all..."* (Mark 2:9-12)

My beloved, last week we marked the start of Great Lent by celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy over heresy. This week, as we journey deeper into our faith, we are called to think about the ways in which we must come to God if we wish for Him to meet us. How can we be as brave as St. Gregory, the Defender of our Faith; or even the Paralytic, and his friends? God will seek us, only if we seek Him through quiet prayer, fasting and charity toward others. We might not be able to demonstrate our belief exactly as these examples, but we can achieve *theosis* by calling on the Holy Spirit through our sincere desire, as demonstrated by our thoughts, words, and deeds.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta