



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, the Church shows us through the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas & Gospel of the Healing of the Paralytic, how mankind may achieve theosis by seeking God's grace.

St. Gregory Palamas is known 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. An Orthodox Priest named Barlaam incorrectly viewed Hesychasm as a heresy, believing it spoke of a visible and invisible God. However, all St. Gregory meant was 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 therefore have a

true 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 as a sign of true love and devotion. The Paralytic of the Gospel has four dear friends who love 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 among us, seeing a full and crowded house, holding a friend's bed, would feel that bringing him would be too difficult; that people would not move, and that Jesus would not see him in the crowd?

However, these doubts are pushed aside, because of the love these men have for their friend. They wish to see him made well and will not be discouraged or tempted to turn away. "...[T]hey 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 their 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, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, knows the hardness of their hearts and minds, 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, however, as we journey deeper into our faith and our own lives, we are called to think about the ways in which we must come to God, if we wish for Him to meet us.

He 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 those four friends did for the Paralytic, but we can achieve theosis by calling on the Holy Spirit through our sincere desire, as demonstrated by our thoughts, words, and deeds.

+ALEXIOS

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