



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This week, the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, shows how our faith is not an abstract concept, but a living reality in which we are all called to participate. 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 law that Moses met in the Burning Bush, and which the Disciples saw during our Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. An Orthodox Priest named Barlaam argued that Hesychasm was a heresy, but all St. Gregory meant was that Hesychasts could experience God's energies, and in knowing God's energies we could have true spiritual knowledge of God. Barlaam's claim not only denies that the Holy Spirit made wise Apostles out of fishermen, but it also does a great disservice to many of our ancestors who were not educated, but who helped to bring Orthodoxy to America. They understood, without Barlaam's philosophy, that what Hesychasm requires is effort.

The Paralytic we encounter in this Sunday's Gospel shows the kind of effort St. Gregory advocated. This Paralytic has four dear friends who wish to help him meet Jesus, even though St. Mark tells us, *"So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door..."* (Mark 2:2) However, they will not be discouraged, so *"...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). Ordinarily, out of respect for free will, Christ would ask those coming before Him "What do you want me to do for you?" After seeing the desire of the Paralytic & his friends, instead, Jesus says, *"My son, your sins are forgiven"* (Mark 2:5). Naturally, the Pharisees think, *"Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mark 2:7) Christ, knowing the hardness of their hearts, 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)

One detail that stands out is the question of desire. So much emphasis is often placed on the role of the Paralytic's friends, because they demonstrate true Christian love, by wanting the best for him. This can often reduce the Paralytic to a figure who never speaks and who does not perform the physical action of removing and digging through the roof. However, it seems that the Church places this reading annually on the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, because it is the Paralytic's desire to be close to God that speaks to the practice of still unceasing prayer. God will meet us in the home, which is our hearts, but only if we dig through its hardness, not imitating the judgment of the Pharisees, but instead calling on the Holy Spirit to help us pray, fast and give charitably.

**+SEVASTIANOS
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