

Maronite Monks of Adoration

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Most Holy Trinity Monastery ❖ Petersham MA 01366-9725

Our Apostolate and Ministry of Prayer and Reparation

“And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought to him a blind man and they begged him that he might touch him” (Mark 8:22).

Not too long ago, I was reading this passage from the Gospel of St. Mark. And the part that caught my attention first was the fact that “they begged him that he might touch him.” What a gracious thing to do: to beg Christ to touch someone in need of healing.

As for understanding this passage of the Gospel, fortunately, I don’t depend on myself to learn about sacred Scripture but instead I go to the great saints and learn their teaching about what the Word of God means. This way doesn’t rule out the possibility of the Holy Spirit enlightening me. Rather it seems more likely that He will enlighten me if I humble myself and seek light from a greater mind than mine. Surely, this is a

safer road to follow given the fact that I’m not as pure and close to God as were the saints. They can teach me much more than I might presume to find out for myself—and then arrogantly call all my mistakes “inspirations” from God! Experience proves that this is the ordinary way that the Holy Spirit guides and enlightens us.

So, as I was reading this passage and considering what a merciful deed those men of old performed by bringing this blind man to Christ and begging for his healing touch, I picked up a collection of

sayings of the great saints and great teachers of our faith, a collection which contains their comments upon the four Gospels, line by line.

The sayings were selected and compiled by no less a luminary than St. Thomas Aquinas. But he has no word of his own to say in this work, it’s only his collection of the sayings of the saints on the Gospel.

I turned to this passage and found some very consoling words from the saints—and some beautiful insights and helpful explanations of the difficult parts in this short passage (Mk. 8:22-26). This, in turn, helped me to understand better to what God has called us here in the monastery:

our ‘apostolate and ministry of prayer and reparation’.

Among the comments of the saints concerning this passage, Saint Bede offers these words:

“They bring to him a blind man, that is, one who neither sees what he has been, what he is, nor what he is to be. They ask him to touch him, for what is being touched, but feeling compunction?” As often as I complain of the blindness of others, (indeed, there sufficient evidence of the blindness of others) yet, do I ever think to take them, spiritually at least, to Christ and *beg him to touch them?* I should go out of my way to bring them to Christ—for He alone can give them eyes to see, He alone can touch them and move them to



Illustration: Maronite Monks

compunction and He alone can heal them.

St. Bede continues:

“For the Lord touches us, when He enlightens our minds with the breath of His Spirit, and He stirs us up that we may recognize our own infirmity, and be diligent in good actions. He takes the hand of the blind man, that He may strengthen him to the practice of good works.”

At this point, I was able to remember the fact that the ancient Maronite word for monk is “*abilo*”, which means “one who mourns”. It recalls our Lord’s words in the sermon on the mount: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be consoled” (Mt. 5:4). For what should we mourn but our sins and the sins of the whole world? What greater tragedy is there, really, than that a man harms himself in his soul and loses his soul? What is more lamentable than our own blindness? As our liturgy for monks and hermits says: “While the world slept, they kept vigil. While the world ate and drank, they fasted. When the world sang and danced, *they mourned for their sins.*” And in another passage: “To the [hermits], the day was dark as night. They followed a light unseen by the world.”

So, this is an essential feature of our life here at Most Holy Trinity Monastery: spiritually to bring others who are blind to the healing touch of Christ by means of the apostolate and ministry of prayer and reparation.



Now, for a different consideration. Among the difficulties of Scripture passages, I’ve always wondered about this one. It concerns how our Lord proceeded to heal this blind man. St. Mark writes:

“And taking the hand of the blind man he led him outside the village; and spitting upon his eyes, with hands placed upon him, he asked him: “Do you see anything?” And looking he said: “I see men, that as trees I see walking.” Then again he placed his hands upon his eyes; and he began to see and was restored and he saw all things clearly.”

So, what happened? Was our Lord distracted when he healed him so that only *some* divine power healed him, and even imperfectly? Or did he forget to eat his Wheaties that morning? Of course, these are absurd suggestions. But it takes faith to realize that these are absurd. We believe that Christ is the “power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24) and He never does anything except good, and that perfectly. We believe He knew exactly what He was doing, without making any mistakes. We believe that the Gospel of St. Mark—as all of sacred Scripture—teaches us the truth without any error. That being said, what does this strange healing mean? Why such a process?



“I see men, that as trees I see walking.”

Mk. 8:24

First, we should note, as the Fathers indicate, that the blind man and his friends were from the village of Bethsaida. But, according to the judgment of Christ Himself, Bethsaida was not known for its faith in Him: “Woe to you, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Therefore I say to you: it will be easier for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you” (Mt. 11:21-22). We understand, then, that their unbelief was an impediment to Christ’s healing. As we learn about His own village, that “He did not do many mighty works there on account of their unbelief” (Mt. 13:58).

This being the circumstance for the healing of the blind man, i.e., the environment of unbelief, the healing itself becomes a sign of the difficulty of being healed of such spiritual darkness—and not only the spiritual darkness of the blind man himself, *but even of those who brought him to Christ.* St. John Chrysostom says: “He asked him whether he could see anything, which He had not done in the case of any whom He had healed, thus showing that *by the weak faith of those who brought him, and of the blind man himself,* his eyes could not be altogether opened. Wherefore it follows: ‘And he looked up and said: I see men as trees walking’; because he was still under the

influence of unfaithfulness, he said that he saw obscurely.” And another holy writer states: “The reason why he did not see at once perfectly, but in part, was that he had not perfect faith; for healing is bestowed in proportion to faith.” St. Bede declares: “though by one word He could cure the man wholly and all at once, still He cures him by degrees, that He may show the greatness of the blindness of man, which can hardly, and only as it were step by step, be restored to light.” Moreover, after he began to see, after his senses were healed, Christ then enlightens him more perfectly still, i.e., by faith, as St. Chrysostom says: “From the commencement, however, of the return of his senses, He leads him to apprehend things by faith, and thus makes him see perfectly; wherefore it goes on, ‘After that, he put his hands again upon his eyes, and he began to see,’ and afterwards he adds, ‘And he was restored, and saw all things clearly;’ that is, being perfectly healed in his senses and intellect.” Lastly, our Lord sends

him to his house and commands him: “Don’t even enter the village.” Why? Because of the environment of unbelief: “because they [in the village] were unfaithful, ... lest perchance he should receive hurt in his soul from them and they, by their unbelief, should run into a more grievous crime,” i.e., of ruining (scandalizing) the faith of one who believes.

In the monastery, when we bring others to Christ and beg Him to touch them, we want to be strong in faith. Our ‘environment’ should be protected from the dark influence of infidelity and unbelief. Having received from God the grace of a vocation to the monastic way of life, we make every effort to *repair the damage* (the work of reparation) in our souls by our own sins as well as the sins of others and the influence those sins have on us. We seek to establish, here in the “Happy Valley”, an environment of faith, light for the eyes of our minds, a light that shines forth from the desert, that is, the Light of Christ. ✠