

Do You Believe That I Am Able To Do This?

7th Sunday of Matthew

July 23, 2017

As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord."

In this story, the two blind men express their faith in several ways. First, they follow Jesus. Then they call upon Him, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." The words, "Son of David," were in that place and time filled with meaning, because they referred to the Messiah, the man who would save the people of Israel and bring the nation to glory once again. Then after entering a home, the Lord directly asks them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They respond by saying not simply, "Yes," but rather, "Yes, Lord." Though they were physically blind, yet they had a sense of who Jesus was.

One of my personal favorites is a story found in the book of Daniel that is read in church every year on Holy Saturday morning. The mighty and evil King Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of Babylon, has erected a statue of himself with an order that when the trumpet sounds, everyone is to turn and worship the statue. The evil king learns that three young Jewish men working in his administration are refusing to worship the statue. He has them arrested and brought before him. Nearby is a blazing furnace, where all who disobey are to be executed by fire. In so many words he addresses the young men, saying, "You see me; you see this flaming furnace? Who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?"

One of the young men responded. "There is a God in the heavens, whom we serve, and He is able to save us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us from your hands, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image you set up." In other words, we worship a God who can save us, but if He chooses to not do so, we will be faithful to Him anyway.

In both of these stories people expressed faith in God's ability to help them, and in each case God performed miracles. But this is not always the case.

Yesterday our church honored St. Markella, a young girl whose mother had died young and whose father abused her and held unholy desires for her. She did her best to hold him off; then she fled in terror, probably praying for help from God. He pursued her and killed her. At the place of her martyrdom is a spring associated with a plethora of miracles. People have come for centuries and many have had healings.

Tomorrow we honor St. Christina, the child of a pagan father who espoused Christianity and thus enraged her father. He turned her over to the authorities who had her mutilated and then impaled, bring on her death. In both cases. that of St. Markella and that of St. Christina, it would

appear that God did not respond to their expressions of faith, because He let them suffer and die. But in the Church's eyes, they gained places in heaven, in God's presence, and are better off than they would have been otherwise.

Christianity is a religion of hope. We heard earlier the words of St. Paul, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." We believe that God created us for joy and happiness in His presence, and that ultimately this is what awaits us, but the path to this joy is not always painless.

Things do not always make sense; things do not always go the way that we would like them to go or the way we think God should let them go, but we believe that God's intent is for a glorious and happy ending. And so when we ask for something and the Lord asks us, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?", then our answer should always be "Yes, Lord," though the result is something out of our control- it is a judgment call that we leave in God's care.

Christianity is a religion with a happy ending. The book of Revelation, the very last book in the Bible, describes the end times in terms of this great battle between the forces of good and evil. It is for the most part a scary book to read, but the ending is what matter most. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'"

Ultimately, everything boils down to faith. Do we trust God to care for us as He sees fit, or do we question and challenge Him? Faith is always a struggle, but we believe in happy endings.

Fr. Stephen J. Callos

\*\*\*\*\*

Text:

Matthew 9:27-35

At that time, as Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

As they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.