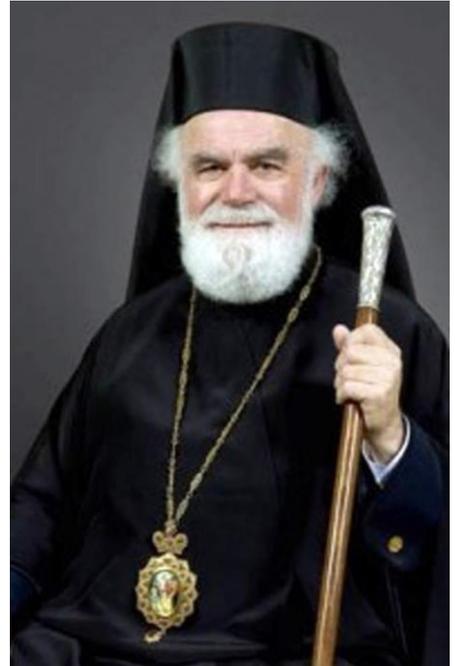


My Beloved Ones,

Having come to this, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are presented with a passage from the Gospel of Mark that the Fathers of the Church intend to reinforce things we have learned during the first half of the Fast. There is a man who has a child who under the power of the Evil One. Many times his son has attempted to kill himself, by falling into fire and water. The father brings his possessed son to the disciples. However, Mark demonstrates that the father did this to test their power, as he lacked faith.

At this point in our Lord's earthly ministry, the disciples have become very close to Him, and He has given them the authority to preach, heal, and even to raise the dead. When the disciples find themselves unable to exorcize the spirit, the father approaches Jesus and informs Him, *"I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able... if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."* (Mark 9:18; 22).

Our Lord is obviously pained, for this man clearly loves his son, but our Lord knows that he does not believe. *"And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'"* (Mark 9:23-24) Seeing this man in all his weakness, our Lord rebuked the evil spirit, and lifted the boy from a fainting which appeared to the crowds to resemble death. Later, in a private conversation with His disciples, they asked, *"Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting."* (Mark 9:28-29)



This is the lesson we are meant to take from this Gospel: if we wish to be closer to our Lord, we must fast and pray. Recently, I ate with some friends, who chose to eat meat during the Fast. While I explained that fasting is a conscious choice, they stated that they were unable to do this. This is a feeling that I see with many, but I encourage everyone to strive for a stronger willpower. If we do not have a stronger will, how can we be closer to our Lord? A person who lacks willpower is that much more subjected to the temptations of a sinful life by which the Devil seeks to ensnare us. For God has given to us freewill, expecting us to do what is necessary to live closer to Him, but the Devil seeks to keep us apart. And in today's society there are so many obstacles that provide us with the means to do something that is wrong; something that is evil; something that is a sin. These sins are committed against ourselves, or just as often, against our neighbor: through envy, theft or hatred.

In order to help us take control of our thoughts and actions, the Fathers remind us that we must constantly watch ourselves, cultivating good thoughts rather than evil. Those who cultivate good thoughts transform their hearts into a welcoming place, with a mind that carefully weighs actions according to their respective fruits.

The Church gives us all the tools that we need in this Gospel. Firstly, we need to have faith. Secondly, we must use the spiritual assistance provided by the Sacramental life of the Church. In order to receive the Sacramental life, we must fast and pray, as our Lord instructed His disciples. Like the father, we too are suffering, with pain in our hearts. If we truly wish to have our burden lifted, we must strength our own unbelief through both fasting and prayer. This is what I pray that we strive for, living on this earth, with one true goal: to be closer to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to love Him as He loved us. For by His love, we have been freed, and can forever be freed from the Evil One.

**+ALEXIOS**  
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