

# Christ

*the Physician of our Souls and Bodies*

This Kind is Only Healed by Prayer & Fasting

## March Catechetical Reflection



CATECHETICAL YEAR 2021-22  
EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES OF AMERICA

The season of Great Lent was given to us by God as an appointed time for attaining Holy-Power unto true repentance—turning from our sin, and turning unto God—finding the Holy. This repentant season of Lent the Church facilitates for us the well tested means of holiness: prayer and fasting.

Consider the power of holiness accessible to us in the kind of repentance produced through faithful prayer and fasting. The power given through “prayer and fasting” is unique because only in this discipline is our most serious, distorted, and debilitating sin overcome.

In the Gospel of Mark 9:17 - 29, which we will hear proclaimed on the Sunday of St. John of the Ladder, and in the parallel account of Matthew 17:14 - 21, we are introduced to an account of violent demonic possession of a young boy. His father pleads with the Lord, “Master, I have brought to you my son, who has a dumb spirit; and whenever it seizes him it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth; and he is wasting away.” The father is hopeless to overcome this evil, for his last attempt has failed, “I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him.”

If we are familiar with the story, this may seem odd because in Matthew 10:1 the apostles were given authority to cast out demons. The power of sin seems too great, even for the apostles, at this point; however, there is one remedy for such prevailing sin. The apostles ask him, “Why could we not cast it out?”

In Matthew’s account Jesus tells them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

But faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26), and in this case, special works are needed, so Jesus says to them, “This kind can be cast out in no way except by prayer and fasting.” Jesus’ answer is nearly formulaic. He teaches the apostles that:

*Faith + prayer and fasting = power to overcome even the greatest of sin*

We see then, when one believes in the possibility of holiness, and fights to remove sin through the work of prayer and fasting, the power to overcome the greatest of sin is readily available. Now we see how to turn away from sin, but we must also consider how to turn to God, for true repentance requires both.

Praise be to God!... Because the simple solution is the same:

*Faith + prayer and fasting = power to acquire holiness/God*

Thus, the power given through "prayer and fasting" gives one direct access to holiness, to living in Christ.

We see this again in the life of the Early Church after Pentecost. In Acts 4:17-33, the apostles are under threat not to preach in the name of Jesus, so they report the danger they face to their Christian community.

In response, "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them ...now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand...And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

In parallel to the formula seen above: Through faith in God, the people pray, and what is more they are given "power." In this case, the holiness is manifested in:

- "the filling of the Spirit" unto presumed "healing,"
- "signs and wonders"
- preaching with "boldness"
- unity of "heart and soul"
- "self-giving"
- "great power"
- and "grace."

Thus, prayer and fasting imparts power for both healing from sin & health to live out the Gospel life.

During the Great Fast, the Church invites us also to experience of the power of prayer and fasting together. We are offered an abundance of examples of this power in the lives of the holy men and women who have gone before us.

One such example is our Holy Father St. John of the Ladder (also known as St. John Climacos), commemorated on the Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast, the Sunday this Gospel is proclaimed. St. John, for his *Ladder of the Divine Ascent*, is considered one of our greatest teachers on prayer and growth in holiness. The troparion of St. John of the Ladder tells us that his "abundant tears *made the wilderness sprout and bloom,*" and made his labor "*fruitful a hundredfold.*"

During these weeks of preparation for Great and Holy Pascha, let us cooperate likewise with the Holy Spirit, through prayer and fasting, and see the fruitfulness given to us in turn.