



My Beloved Ones,

Beginning this third week of Great Lent, the Church seeks to show us through the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas & the Healing of the Paralytic, how mankind may achieve theosis by demonstrating effort in seeking God's grace.

St. Gregory Palamas is most famous for his defense of Hesychasm, a monastic practice of still, unceasing prayer which can allow the supplicant to encounter the Uncreated Light of God: the same that Moses witnessed in the Burning Bush, and what the disciples saw during our Lord's Transfiguration. An Orthodox Priest named Barlaam incorrectly viewed Hesychasm as a heresy, believing it advocated for a visible and invisible God. St. Gregory said that while man could never truly experience God's *essence* in this life, Hesychasts could experience God's *energies*; and therefore, a true spiritual knowledge of God.

What Hesychasm requires, is a very serious demonstration of effort, for this kind of Grace comes to those who seek it. And we can see from this week's Gospel reading, how our Lord sees these efforts as signs of true love and devotion. A Paralytic has four dear friends whose love is so great, that they go out of their way to assist him in visiting the crowded house where Jesus is preaching: they remove the roof and lower him past the crowd. They understand Jesus who says, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."* (Matthew 7:7). Seeing the Paralytic lowered, however, Jesus does something very unusual.

Ordinarily, out of respect for their free will, Christ would ask those coming before Him, "Do you wish to receive your sight?" or "What do you want me to do for you?" In the case of the Paralytic, instead, He says, *"My son, your sins are forgiven."* (Mark 2:5). Naturally, this causes a scandal, for the Pharisees present, think, *"Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mark 2:7) Christ of course, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, knows the hardness of their hearts, and He 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)

My beloved, last week we marked the start of Great Lent by celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy over heresy. This week, however, as we journey deeper into our faith and our own lives, we are called to consider the ways in which we must come to God, if we wish for Him to meet us. He will seek us, only if we seek Him through quiet prayer, fasting and charity toward others. We might not be able to demonstrate our belief exactly as those four friends did for the Paralytic, but we can achieve theosis by calling on the Holy Spirit through our sincere desire, as demonstrated by our thoughts, words, and deeds.

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Metropolitan of Atlanta