

Homily for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost

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In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

In today's Gospel reading we hear about Jesus Christ our Lord healing two blind men.

Every Gospel reading is so full of meaning, a real source of meaning, because the Gospel speaks of eternal timeless truths, of the eternal truth of God.

Today's Gospel is not different. It speaks of eternal truths that are of great importance to our everyday lives. It speaks of the love of God for man and of the love of man for God. It speaks of the fact that God always provides for us and that He will always provide us with His merciful assistance and that this assistance will never leave us.

Whatever may happen to us, God will never abandon us when we are in trouble or in need. He only wants us to do one thing: to remain with Him through our faith in Him, our love for Him and our trust in Him.

But let us return to the two blind men. When they ask for healing, Jesus Christ our God asks them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' When they answer, "Yes, Lord", Christ heals them and proclaims, "According to your faith let it be to you."

This is a constant theme in the Gospels. Every time Christ heals an infirmity, He states, time and time again, "Your faith has made you well!" When he heals the servant of the centurion, Christ attributes the healing to the faith of the centurion. When he heals the woman with the issue of blood, He attributes the healing to her faith.

Again and again, Jesus says, "your faith has made you well." This is an extremely important message: if we want to benefit from our relationship with God, we must be faithful, we must believe.

God's presence is not the variable. God's love is not the variable. God's willingness is not the variable. In fact, He is the one and only factor which is invariable and constant that we will ever be able to experience in our lives.

God is truly everywhere. He is truly all merciful. When, as today, we come to church, He is here. When we get in our car or on a bus, train or airplane, He is there. When we are at work or at home, He is there. Wherever we are, He is there.

When we commit sins, and when we do good things, He is there! When we go to sleep, and when we wake up, He is there! He loves us unconditionally and He loves the whole world, regardless whether we know Him or not.

As with the two blind men, the Lord has given us the opportunity to heal the blindness of the eye of our soul.

God has given us a sure and prescribed path toward our healing, our growth, and salvation through His Church. He teaches us how to pray through the Church.

He feeds us with the Sacrament through the Church. He teaches us the disciplines of the ascetic life: fasting and prayer through the Church, and He gives us Confession through the Church as a means of purification.

God provides all this to us so that we may continue to learn and entrust more of ourselves to Him, who is the Great Physician. And through these means we progress in the knowledge and love of God.

This progress in the knowledge and love of God is always meant to be active, never inactive. To become deified, we have to be active Christians.

As we all know, it is ever so easy to forget about God and all He does for us. It is ever so easy to have our own opinions and our own ways. To have opinions and ways which are not those of the Church.

It is so much more convenient to lead a worldly, material life. Why? Because leading a worldly, material life is much easier than trying to live in the footsteps of Christ. It is much easier to take Orthodoxy on our own terms, picking and choosing what we like and discarding what we do not like. But that is not Christianity, and it definitely will NOT bring us the healing we need.

One of the most important means which Christ gives us through His Church, to find healing from our spiritual sickness is the Sacrament of Repentance: Confession, and the subsequent reception of the Eucharist: Communion.

Saint Cyril I Patriarch of Alexandria said:
As two pieces of wax fused together make one
So he who receives Holy Communion is
So united with Christ that Christ is in him
And he is in Christ.

For this reason, the Church encourages us to take regular confession so that we can enjoy the benefits of regular reception of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is also called the “Medicine of Immortality”, because it unites us with Christ Himself and heals our souls.

But this only happens if we receive in faith, through preparation and purification, which is itself a part of that Medicine. Confession and Reception, the Church teaches us, go hand in hand.

The prayers for reception of the Eucharist ask for confession and purification as a preparation for worthily receiving Christ's precious and all-holy Body and Blood.

And so through all of this, we see that our healing of the soul demands something of our material bodies, our time, our energy, our worship, our prayers, our heartfelt repentance and requires us to turn to Christ our God, just like the blind men did when they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us."

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Sacrament of Confession, we learn what the root causes of the sins that cause us to stumble are, the sins that cause us and others sadness and pain, our pride and false dependence on ourselves.

We can only grow in confidence in our identity and self-worth in Christ, if we begin to peel away the layers of our souls to reveal the core of our struggles, the passions and self-will that holds us back.

Confession is truly a gift from God. But this type of soul searching, demands a necessary humility and willingness on our part to accept healing from God.

We have to spend time in prayer, self-examination, and worship, so that we can make the most of the Sacrament and the healing and growth that God would offer us through it.

To obtain salvation we need an ongoing willingness to be healed, to progress in our healing. Saint James teaches us that we are saved through our faith that manifests itself through our actions and deeds, the living out of that faith. Faith and works go hand in hand.

We cannot afford to lay aside our struggle with sin and lay aside our obedience to what Christ teaches us through His Church. Christ asks the blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" We have been shown the way, but only if we want to make use of it.

My prayer for each one of us is that we would all continue to make use of the means for our salvation, which Christ offers us through His Church for our growth, our healing and our salvation.

As we grow, individually and as a community in our reflection of Christ and the Kingdom, we must help others find their healing and salvation in Christ as well, through our example.

May we each cultivate the attitude of our souls and the cooperation of our bodies to follow Christ with all that we have, all that we are, crying out to Him as did the blind men, "Lord, have mercy on us," knowing that He is the Lord who loves us, and indeed has mercy on our souls.

Nearly 2000 years ago, Our Lord Jesus Christ walked the earth, healing every infirmity and disease in people, just like He healed these two blind men of the Gospel who had unwavering faith in Him.

Now, too, the Lord Jesus Christ heals all who have faith in Him throughout the entire world with that same Divine power, granting them peace, true joy, and salvation.

Let us believe Him, just as the two blind men believed Him. Let us be faithful like them in our faith and love for Him. And let us glorify throughout all the earth His most wondrous and majestic Divine Name.

Amen.