

**ON FAITH, PRAYER AND FASTING**  
**THE HEALING OF THE LUNATIC BOY**  
**Matthew 17:14-23 - Sunday, August 16, 2020**

The possessed boy in today's Gospel is called a "lunatic" in the original Greek.<sup>(1)</sup> This was because the devil deliberately manifested the power of possession in the boy by casting him into the water and into the fire when the moon was full. It was the intention of the devil that by this the people would blame nature, in this case, the moon, as being the cause of the boy's infirmity. By blaming the moon, it would be the same thing as blaming God, because the moon is part of the natural order of creation made by God. The boy's father complains in front of the crowd to our Savior that the disciples were unable to cast out the demon. The Lord protects the public reputation of His disciples by blaming instead the lack of faith of the father, as well as citing the lack of faith of "this perverse generation." As Christians we must be very careful about reproving others. It is natural for a parent to correct their child. It is natural for a husband or wife to correct each other, always with love and humility. However, it is wrong and evil to make a public spectacle out of reproving anyone. None of us are without sin. We wouldn't like it if someone were to publicly accuse or reprove us for something. Therefore, any reprobation should be done privately and quietly and never publicly. Our Lord gives the example today when the disciples quietly come to our Savior to discuss their inability to cure the boy. The Lord tells them that it is because they have no faith. In addition, the great power of prayer and fasting is cited by our Lord as the only thing that can drive the demon out from the possessed boy. Hence, our Savior makes it very clear that prayer and fasting should be a way of life for those of us who would follow Christ and call ourselves Christians. Several times in the Gospel our Savior cites the example of the mustard seed when discussing faith. Faith like a mustard seed is mentioned in the life of St. Mark the Anchorite. This holy struggler spent 95 years of his life in seclusion, living in a cave in Ethiopia, waging spiritual warfare in prayer and fasting in order to conquer the passions and grow close to Christ. In his life it is recorded that a certain monastic father named Serapion visited St. Mark. "During his conversation with Abba Serapion, Saint Mark inquired how things stood in the world. He asked about the Church of Christ, and whether persecutions against Christians still continued. Hearing that idol worship had ceased long ago, the saint rejoiced and asked, "Are there now in the world saints working miracles, as the Lord spoke of in His Gospel, 'If ye have faith even as a grain of mustard seed, ye will say to this mountain, move from that place, and it will move, and nothing shall be impossible for you' (Mt. 17:20)?" As the saint spoke these words, the mountain moved from its place 5,000 cubits (approximately 2.5 kilometers) and went toward the sea. When St. Mark saw that the mountain had moved, he said, "I did not order you to move from your place, but was conversing with a brother. Go back to your place!" After this, the mountain actually returned to its place. Abba Serapion fell down in fright. St. Mark took him by the hand and asked, "Have you never seen such miracles in your lifetime?" "No, Father," Abba Serapion replied. Then St. Mark wept bitterly and said, "Alas, today there are Christians in name only, but not in deeds." We might believe that we have faith but after hearing today's Gospel, as well as hearing the account from the life of St. Mark the Anchorite, we might become discouraged. Instead, with humility, we should actually have hope! Our faith doesn't need to be outwardly large to have a large impact. A mustard seed is about one to two millimeters in size. Yet, the mustard tree can grow upwards of 20 to 30 feet tall and wide. Our faith doesn't need to be outwardly large to have a large impact. The tiny mustard seed holds the potential of a 30-foot tree! A seemingly inconsequential speck of faith can move mountains! Most of us have no need to move physical mountains such as the miracle that took place in the life of Venerable Mark. For us this is a vivid and real example that we can see and understand as an illustration of faith. The mountains that we need to move are personal for each and every one of us. Perhaps we need to move the mountain of our heart in a different and better direction. Perhaps we are oppressed by a mountain of sin and we need to overthrow and rid ourself of this heavy burden. Perhaps there is a mountain of discord in our relationships with family or friends. The Lord gives us the prescription for how to move these mountains. Have just a little faith, and pray and fast. As a result, our life can radically change for the better — and this is the greatest miracle of all. Amen.

1. - The original Greek New Testament says "σεληνιαζεται" which means "He is a lunatic." Some English translations incorrectly translate this as "He is an epileptic."

