

SERMON on the 2nd Sunday of Lent, March 4, 2018

It is no mystery that if it became known that there was some kind of rabbi or prophet who was going around healing the sick and even raising the dead, that people would go running to find this person. Some would come because they might be suffering from an incurable disease. For example, there was no cure for leprosy, so lepers came to Jesus for help. One woman suffered with illness for 18 years and spent all of her money on physicians, and she came to Jesus as a last resort. One man, Jairus, had a daughter who was dying, and sought out Jesus as a last resort. The list just goes on and on. People who are suffering and dying and there is no one who has the ability or power to help them, so they turn to Jesus. Some were curiosity seekers, wanting to see with their own eyes one of these spectacular miracles that everyone was talking about. There were others, like Zacchaeus, who just wanted to see the man Jesus Himself of whom they had heard so much. Finally, there were those who came because they hated Jesus and saw him as a threat and wanted to judge Him and find some reason to have Him killed. As you can see, there were various reasons that people thronged around Jesus, the end result being that Jesus was sought out by many and therefore was usually surrounded by large crowds. What do you think is the greatest of Jesus's abilities and powers? What was greater, to give sight to the blind or to raise the dead? Or perhaps do you think His greatest gift was to make a paralyzed man walk such as the man in today's Gospel? Holy Scripture tells us that it is in your power, not just one or two of us, but each and everyone here, to have a greater gift than raising the dead or giving sight to the blind. Christ, speaking by Paul, says that this gift is love. Even the paralyzed man in today's Gospel, were it not for the faith and love of his friends who carried him to Jesus, would not have had the opportunity to ask Jesus for healing. In 1 Corinthians 12:30-31 St. Paul says, "Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues?...But earnestly desire the higher gifts and I will show you a still more excellent way." What is this "more excellent way" that Paul is speaking about? The Corinthians were very proud people, and they were very proud of their gifts, among them, the gift of speaking in tongues. But Paul tells them about a gift that is more excellent than all of their gifts. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." If we truly understand what it means to have the gift of love and kindness, then we will seek and live by this gift. Having love is greater than raising the dead. Christ Himself said while speaking with His disciples, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). In John 13:34 Jesus tells His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Even if we do good deeds but do not have love, then whatever we do is worthless unless everything we do is done with love. Paul says, "Though I give my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, I am nothing." If we have love and love one another, we will have all that is necessary in order to grow in the virtues. It is one thing to love someone because we want to be loved in return. It is another thing to love for God's sake, expecting nothing in return. When we love for God's sake, then our love extends not only to our friends and those of like mind as us, but to all men and women, no matter what they believe or how they live. Doesn't God love all men, even His enemies? Didn't He weep and pray for those who hated Him, even with His dying breath as He hung on the Cross? We will be like God, not if we perform miracles, but if we love all men, even our enemies. We admire God when He performs miracles, but don't we admire God more when He shows love and is long suffering? If we admire God when He shows love, how much more admirable is it when we show love? Then let us seek and run after love, and we will in no way be inferior to Paul and Peter and all those who have raised innumerable dead, though we may not even be able to drive away even a fever. If we work greater miracles than the Apostles themselves; if we expose ourselves to innumerable dangers for the sake of the faith, there will be no profit to us if we do not have love. The very nourisher of love, our Lord Himself, knows and teaches us

these things. To Him let us be obedient, and we will receive the good things promised, of which may we all be made partakers, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.