

SERMON - The Raising of the Paralytic, March 15, 2020

When I hear about all of these people crowding around our Lord, “so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door, “ I can’t help but think of a Russian priest who lived in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, St. John of Kronstadt. His life as a priest did not start out remarkable, at least as far as crowds following him goes. He lived with his wife as brother and sister, and chose to remain a virgin. He would give his salary and even his clothes away to the poor. Often he would come home not only without his money but even without his shoes or his coat. His bishop decided to no longer give him his salary but gave it to St. John’s Matushka instead. He served Divine Liturgy every day and spent long hours in prayer. He ate very little and he slept very little. He taught Sunday school. Then one day God gave St. John a very special gift, the gift to heal those who were sick. We might call St. John a miracle worker, for God heard his prayers. His life became similar to our Lord’s. Just as the crowds were always following our Lord, either to receive healing or to see a miracle, St. John could go nowhere without huge crowds following him, asking for healing, asking for money and asking for miracles. Everyone has enemies and people who say unkind things about us. St. John was no different. Our Lord had enemies as we all know so well. St. John said that the hurtful things his enemies said about him did not bother him, because he knew that within him dwelt the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, the crowds would not follow him like they did. So St. John was not disturbed by his enemies who tried to slander him. Last year I visited a women’s monastery in St. Petersburg. The church is consecrated to St. John the Evangelist. St. John served in this church many times when he visited St. Petersburg. Mother Eupraxia, the abbess, told me that thousands of people would gather in the street when St. John was seen walking to the church. They even watched him from the rooftops and all the windows of all the buildings were filled with people trying to catch a glimpse of St. John as he walked by and entered the church. When St. John served, the church was filled to overflowing. There were so many people, it was impossible for St. John and the other priests to hear everyone’s confession. So St. John would have everyone shout out their sins at the same time. When everyone was finished confessing in this manner, then St. John would hold his epitrichil (priest’s stole) high over everyone and read the prayer of absolution. I think that one reason St. John became so holy and well liked was because he had so much love for God and for others, much much more than the average person. St. John’s favorite book when he was growing up that he read all the time was the New Testament. As he grew, he began to embody more and more what he read in the Gospel. St. John dedicated his entire life to serving others—visiting people and listening to their problems and giving them spiritual advice, praying so much for the needs of everyone, giving away money that was given to him to those in need. When St. John served in Mother Eupraxia’s monastery church, it was impossible for him to leave because of the throng of the crowd. Mother Eupraxia showed me a secret hidden staircase which was built behind the altar, so that in this manor St. John was able to escape from the crowds when the service had ended. People loved to go to Confession to St. John. Those who could not visit him wrote their confession in a letter and would mail it to him. He would answer these thousands of letters with spiritual advice and the prayer of absolution. We all need someone that we can feel safe to talk to, with whom we can talk about our problems and the things that trouble us. We all need someone special that we can trust. It is only through talking about our problems and the things inside of us that cause us grief that we can receive healing. That is why Confession is so important. It is necessary to have someone who will listen to us, and that is how we receive spiritual healing and the forgiveness of our sins. Sometimes it can be scary or embarrassing to speak about our personal lives in front of someone else. That is why we must find someone that we feel safe with and that we feel that we can trust and respect. We all need someone who shows love, kindness and understanding to us, and that is the person we will go to. That is why so many people were drawn to St. John. He was so holy and filled so much with the Spirit of God that love and kindness emanated from him and drew people in. And God heard St. John’s prayers. Very few priests are holy like St. John, and all priests

struggle, just like we all do, with our sins and temptations. But even a humble priest, maybe not a saint like John of Kronstadt, but sincere, honest, who truly loves God and people, even a humble priest can be a safe and trusting harbor to whom we can feel safe to go to in order to confess our sins and receive spiritual healing for our souls. Remember, we need to talk about the things that are bothering us and we need someone we trust who will listen. This takes courage and faith. This isn't always very easy to do. But if we overcome our fear and shyness, the result will be well worth it, and we will feel so much more peaceful in our souls. Our Savior forgives the paralytic his sins, and then our Savior heals him of his paralysis, and restores him to full spiritual and physical health. The average priest may not be able to ask God to heal someone's paralysis or raise the dead, but every priest has the gift to help us receive healing for our soul and to help us achieve peace in our hearts. And that is the greatest miracle of all. Amen.