

SUNDAY OF THE HEALING OF TWO BLIND MEN
Matthew 9:1-8

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church, Watervliet, NY 12189, July 23, 2023

We most often think about our Savior as the Son of God, all-powerful, Divine, one of the Holy Trinity. Perhaps we don't very often remember or think about the fact that our Savior was also incarnate, a man in every sense of the word, and that He had a human life on this earth the same as you and I. We all know very well the nature of our needs and desires, our temptations, our feelings, our hopes and our fears. All men and women have these experiences and emotions. We probably don't think very often about the fact that Jesus also had these experiences. If He didn't, then we cannot say that He was truly man. The dogma of the Church that we confess in the Creed is that our Savior was perfect God and perfect man. However, we probably don't think very often about what His human life was like as a man.

He was born of a peasant woman in an obscure village, and grew up in another obscure village. He worked with His father and brothers in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, so He knew what it was to do labor and to earn a living. He never wrote a book. He never held public office. He never owned a home. He never married and He never had children or His own family. He never went to college and He had no credentials. He never visited a big city, and He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where He was born. For three years He was an itinerant preacher. During that time He constantly gave to others and did for others whatever He had the power given to Him by God His Father to do: He preached the Word of God and the way to salvation, He healed the sick, He restored sight to the blind, He made the lame to walk, the deaf were made to hear and the dumb received the gift of speech. He cast out the demons and He even brought the dead back to life. Every moment of His adult life He was constantly followed and surrounded by people asking Him for help: "Lord, my daughter is dying, please help her!", "Lord, there is no one to carry me into the healing pool, please help me!", and in today's Gospel, "Have mercy on us, for we are blind!" Rarely did anyone ever offer Him anything in return, or offer to do something for Him. Often He was not even verbally thanked for His kindness. Once, when Jesus healed ten lepers, only one returned to say "thank you." "Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" Jesus asked (Luke 17:17). Nonetheless, He never asked for anything for Himself. He spoke only the truth, and for this He was hated. He only had love and forgiveness for others and never sought anything for personal gain. Once a woman broke open an alabaster jar of costly ointment and anointed His feet, and for this He was reprimanded by one of His disciples who complained that this was a waste of money (Matthew 26:6-13). On the eve of His execution when He faced a terrifying, horrible and unjust death, He asked three of His disciples to keep Him company and pray with Him. Instead, He kept His vigil alone because they all fell asleep. In spite of all the countless people that He had helped, not one person spoke up for Him when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. Even his own disciples ran away. He went through the indignity of a trial. He was spat upon and mocked. He was nailed to a Cross between two thieves. The only thing He owned while He was dying, His robe, was taken away from Him and gambled for by His executioners. After His death His body was taken down from the Cross and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty wide centuries have come and gone since Jesus walked on the earth. Someone once said that "All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that One Solitary Life...."

As disciples of our Savior we are called upon to seek to do good for others. "It is better to give than to receive," our Savior teaches us. We are hard wired and made that way. We experience much more joy when we give to others than when we receive for ourselves. The Greek word for this is "philotimo." In Asiatic languages, when translated into English, this is

literally expressed as “generosity of the spirit.” One way of looking at salvation is that we are saved when our spirit becomes like the Lord’s spirit, and when our way of life becomes like the Lord’s way of life: a life of philotimo, generosity of the spirit, giving instead of receiving, loving and caring for others more than we love and we care for ourselves, being content with what we have, and living a life of service to others. This is the way of life, this is the path to God, and this is the way of salvation. Amen!

