

Trinity 21

I take as my text today from the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel:

And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Looking at the Collect, Epistle and Gospel for this 21st Sunday after Trinity, we could almost proclaim this as Faith Sunday. All three, in some way approach faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In the Collect, we implore God for his mercy, we who are faithful, that is we who have faith in God and his mercy. That mercy of God is two-fold: first, it is the compassionate pardoning of our sins, and second, the peace that comes when we have been relieved from the torment of sin.

Oftentimes, this Collect is used by lay readers following the Confession in Morning or Evening Prayer, as they are prohibited from pronouncing God's Absolution.

For the faithful, we find peace through God's great mercy when the burden of our sins is lifted from us.

Turning to the Epistle passage from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we faithful Christians, who put on the whole armor of God, find that Faith is our shield from the *fiery darts* shot at us by the evil powers that include Satan and his cohorts. Faith is *above all*, according to Paul.

So, we come to today's Gospel passage from St. John where we find a real demonstration of faith in Jesus Christ when he is approached by a nobleman on behalf of his grievously ailing son.

Though some think this is John's version of the healing of the centurion's son, those accounts of that healing, both in Matthew and Luke, are significantly different enough for us to be reasonably certain that John's account of the healing is, indeed, a separate incident.

From the language that is used, it is most certain that the person pleading for his son's healing was a courtier or high member of the court of Herod Antipas.

Obviously, this courtier, or nobleman, was familiar with the healing miracles of Jesus, perhaps having witnessed them in Jerusalem.

Now Jesus was in Cana of Galilee, where he had performed his first miracle, turning water into wine, when the nobleman approached him, beseeching Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was sick and near death.

Jesus issues a reproach of the man, perhaps more directed at the crowd that gathered around him than at the nobleman, as if he is saying, *O ye of little faith!*

Though John says this is Jesus' second miracle, most likely, the implication is that it is only his second miracle there, in Cana, as in Jerusalem and elsewhere he has performed many miracles, which some in the crowd most likely have witnessed.

Imagine the frustration in our Lord's voice as the crowd gathered closer to see what he would do. No matter how many miracles he would perform, their belief in him would only be fleeting. They wanted to see more and more. It was almost as if he were a street performer, certainly not the Son of God.

The nobleman simply replies: *Sir, come down ere my child die.* To which Jesus assures him: *Go thy way; thy son liveth.*

In a true expression of faith, the nobleman takes leave to return home. He believed in the power of Jesus to heal his son, even from a great distance. A burden had been lifted from him, and on the way home to Capernaum, he was met by servants who declared, *Thy son liveth*.

Inquiring of the time when his son recovered, he knew that it was at that same moment Jesus told him, *Thy son liveth*.

Putting this story into greater perspective: we have a man of nobility pleading with a carpenter, who had become an itinerant teacher, and who was recognized as a prophet by some. He is unperturbed by Jesus' reproach, he responds in humility, and with an obvious faith that Jesus could and would do what he asked.

His faith did not fail him. He was not disappointed. And he shared that faith with his whole household, family and servants alike. He had just experienced a greater love than one can imagine — the love of God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. No. It takes faith.

Everywhere around us, there are the signs and wonders of God. We are surrounded by God's mercy, his love, and the abundance of miracles. But, indeed, we must have faith to see and recognize them.

God is present in the sunrise and the sunset. He is present in the beauty of all his Creation, all that surrounds us. He is present the moment we are conceived. He is present throughout our lives — and he is there when our journey ends here on earth to welcome us into life eternal.

We are surrounded each day by miracles; but, again, we must have faith to see and recognize them.

Through faith the nobleman surrendered to Jesus; from the moment Jesus spoke the words, *Thy son liveth*, his life forever changed.

What does it take for each of us to surrender ourselves to our Lord and Saviour?

How great is our faith? We read about the Saints of ages past, even those of more recent times, how great a faith and love of God each possessed. How does our faith and love of God compare?

Do we need signs and wonders in order to believe?

For those that day in Cana of Galilee, no sign would have sufficed. Their hearts were hardened by pride and a preconceived notion of the Messiah; and their needs were practical and mundane, rather than spiritual.

We all have needs; but the greatest need we all have is the fulfilling of that relationship of love between God and man. It supersedes all our needs, for, when the need of Divine Love is met, all other needs pale.

Our needs are exposed and given up to God when we come to the Altar where we offer up to God our souls and bodies in a Living Sacrifice as we share in the Breaking of Bread, receiving the Body and Blood of Christ offered up for us in love; we share in one of the greatest of miracles; and when we leave the Altar, we hear the words of Christ in our hearts in another miracle: Go thy way; thy **soul** liveth.