Saint Joseph the Hesychast and the Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters Good morning!

“Keep saying the prayer! Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me! This is what will save you. The name of Christ will illumine your nous; it will strengthen your soul; it will help you in the war against the demons; it will cultivate the virtues; and it will become everything for you.”

These are the words of the newly canonized Saint Joseph the Hesychast, whom we celebrate today as a Saint of the Church for the 1st time!

Saint Joseph is the spiritual father of the recently reposed Elder Ephraim of Philotheou, who founded 17 monasteries here in America.

He is called a Hesychast because he was not just a practitioner of the Jesus Prayer but he was a great teacher of the Jesus Prayer and of the inner life of stillness or hesychia. He would tell his disciples to always have the name of Christ on their lips! Don’t stop crying out to Jesus Christ! These words, these short but supremely powerful words are meant for everyone to

say, not just monastics. And these words have tremendous power: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me! When we say this we are fulfilling the commandment of Christ to confess Him (literally) before all people! “Therefore everyone who will confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father in the heavens.” Mt. 10:32.

In today’s Gospel Reading on the 10th Sunday of Matthew we hear about a father who cries out to Jesus: Lord, have mercy on my son! This father brought his possessed son to the Disciples but they could not heal him. However, Jesus is able to heal the boy by casting out the demon! Then the Apostles question the Lord and ask why they couldn’t heal him and To which Christ responds that it is because of their little faith and that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, which is about 1 to 2 millimeters in size, they could move mountains with it and nothing would be impossible. The Lord then goes on to tell them that this kind of demon can only come out through prayer and fasting.

The Father in today’s Gospel cries out a type of the Jesus Prayer. He is calling out to God and asking him to help him and his son who are both suffering. And what does he cry out to Jesus: Lord, have mercy on my child! This is a form of the Jesus Prayer. Shouldn’t this also be our response to every situation? To

call out to our Lord for mercy? Lord, Jesus Christ have mercy on me! It is the most perfect prayer.

As St. Porphyrios says, it is the best way to pray. All we need to do is ask for God's mercy and He will take care of the rest. Who could know what we need better than the One who knows everything. Christ knows what we need and when we need it. St. Porphyrios stresses that praying this prayer shows that we are leaving it in God's hands how He will give us mercy, instead of asking for particular things, in other words, when we say the Jesus prayer, we are not imposing our will on God. And think how different our lives would be, how free we would be, how joyous and filled with depth our hearts would be if we constantly had the name of Christ on our lips and we left everything in God's Hands.

I was speaking with a brother priest yesterday and he remarked that he's realized recently that as deep and amazing as our Faith is, it is also so simple. All we have to do is our part and leave everything else to God. All we have to do is have a mustard seed of Faith.

Beloved, when Jesus Christ tells his Apostles that all they need is the faith of a mustard seed to move a mountain, what do you think He meant?To answer this, let's look at an excerpt from the life of Saint Mark the Anchorite of Athens, who was born in

Athens and desiring to be a monastic, abandoned everything vain and went to the Egyptian desert to struggle in his spiritual life. After 95 years of seclusion, not seeing another human he was visited by Abba Serapion, a fellow ascetic. He asked Abba Serapion 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 nearby moved from its place 5,000 cubits (approximately 2.5 kilometers) and went toward the sea. When Saint 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. Saint Mark took him by the hand and asked, “Have you never seen such miracles in your lifetime?”

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, this miracle from the life of St. Mark the Anchorite of Athens shows us that Christ was not

just talking about figurative mountains but that faith, with prayer and fasting can move even literal mountains! But how do we even get this faith the size of a mustard seed? Is it something that we can simply believe? No, faith is not just believing, it's not wishing, rather **Faith is a genuine active trust in God, even and especially in times of trial and sufferings!** Faith is an active virtue, it involves action! Let us turn to James 2:14-17: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

And the very first steps we take 'Min our spiritual life are the steps of prayer and fasting!

St Theophan the Recluse, writes that: 'Where there is no prayer and fasting, there are the demons'. It makes one wonder why this Gospel is placed on the Sunday after the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos? Didn't we just come out of a strict 2 week fast in preparation for the Dormition? The answer to this is that yes, we just came out of a fasting period but that doesn't mean we are being told by the Church to pig out and "take

revenge” on the fast by over eating and not watching what goes into our mouths, eyes, ears and mind. This is why there are fasting days every week. Every Wednesday and Friday we fast but not to punish ourselves, but rather to help us from living without restraint!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, please, allow me the blessing to challenge you as well as my own self! Let us dedicate time, let us consecrate time (just as we are doing in a similar yet different way, during this very Liturgy) to Christ each morning!

Beloved, let us start with just 2 minutes! 2 Minutes of saying the Jesus Prayer every morning and evening to sanctify our lives, to confess Christ! And let us build up from there! Let us do our part of bringing Christ into our lives! Let us say the prayer when we’re free! Let us say it when we’re driving! Just think of how impactful it would be if we all said the Jesus Prayer on the drive home from Church?! How many streets would be blessed and how many people would be benefited!

Let us take the holy words of St. Joseph the Hesychast that he told to his disciples and apply them to our lives: As soon as you wake up and open your eyes, immediately begin saying the [Jesus] prayer. Don’t let your mind wander here and there, wasting the time that is precious for saying the prayer. When you

force yourself like this, God will also help you acquire the habit of saying the prayer as soon as you wake up. Then you begin your day and work while saying the prayer. In this way, everything is sanctified: the work, the area, the time, the mouth, the tongue, the heart and the entire person who is saying the name of Jesus Christ.

Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner. Amen.