

2024/08/11

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Let us attend!

“At that time, (27) Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying: Son of David, have mercy on us! (28) And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them: Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to Him: Yes, Lord. (29) Then He touched their eyes, saying: According to your faith let it be to you. (30) And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying: See that no one knows it. (31) But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country. (32) As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. (33) And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying: It was never seen like this in Israel! (34) But the Pharisees said: He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons. (35) Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”
[Matthew 9:27–35]

SERMON (DO YOU BELIEVE?)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Prophet King David cried: “Insults, [reproach, and scorn] have broken my heart [in Hebrew, *lib·bî* — inner man, mind, will, and heart]; I am [sick and] full of heaviness [and I am depressed and in despair]. I looked, [waited, and hoped] for [sympathy, compassion], pity, [and consolation from my fellows] but found none. There was no one to comfort me” [Psalms 69:20]. Does this situation sound familiar? Can you identify with this melancholic sentiment?

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: “And because iniquity, [sin, and lawlessness] shall [increase and] abound [to the maximum], the [preference, predisposition, and inclination toward] love [and benevolence] shall wax [and grow] cold in many [or most men]” [Matthew 24:12]. For it was written, and [at the same time] spoken in prophecy: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of man’s thoughts [and the preference, predisposition, and] inclinations of his heart were only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart ... For the [inhabitants of the] earth were [absolutely] corrupt, depraved,

and moreover, ‘liken unto putrid grapes’ in the sight of God. And the earth was filled with violence [in Hebrew, *ḥā-mās* — violence and wrongdoing, including injurious language, harshness, and lust for power]. And God saw the [inhabitants of the] earth, and behold, [they were indeed] corrupt, debased, and degenerate; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth [and had lost all purpose and direction]” [Genesis 6:5–6; 11–12].

Seeing mankind’s misery, God [in His love and compassion] ultimately purposed to save mankind. “For [indeed] God so loved [and pitied] the world, that he gave His [one and] only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him [as Lord and Savior] should not perish, but have everlasting life. And God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world [or to initiate the final judgment of the world], but that the world might be saved through Him. And whosoever believes in Him [that is, whosoever surrenders to His Lordship and trusts in Him as Savior] is not condemned; but whosoever does not believe in Him [and rejects Christ as Lord and Savior] is already judged, convicted, condemned, and sentenced] because he has not believed in the name of the [one and] only begotten Son of God. And this is [the basis for the] judgment, [conviction, condemnation, and sentence]: The Light has come into the world, but men [ran after and] loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. For every man who practices evil hates the light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who lives [in and] by the truth, comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been wrought in [obedience to] God” [John 3:16–21].

According to the Arberian proverb: [*Çdo zemër thyhet, por jo çdo zemër hapet*] ‘Every heart breaks, but not every heart [*breaks and*] opens up [to God].’ And the latter [opening up of the heart to God] can only be attained through ‘Godly sorrow’ [II Corinthians 7:10] which produces ‘heartfelt repentance’ that leads to “times of refreshing” that come from [the presence of] the Lord [and restore the brokenhearted like a cool soothing wind on a hot day]” [Acts 3:19]. Therefore, although the world is without compassion, provision has been made, and there is ‘balm [and compassion] in Gilead’ [Jeremiah 8:22]. For Christ has come to “heal the brokenhearted [who repent] and to bind up [and bandage] their wounds — healing their pain and comforting them in their sorrows” [Psalms 147:3].

Today's lesson in Matthew [9:27–35] contains two remarkable demonstrations of the Lord Jesus Christ's power and authority, and moreover, of His great love and compassion for suffering mankind. After Jesus had resurrected the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue [Matthew 9:18–25], He set out to return to His own lodgings [Mark 5:22]. “And the news [or report] of [Christ's great compassion and] the child's resurrection spread amain [with full force and speed] throughout that whole [land and] region” [Matthew 9:26]. And two blind mendicants [or beggars] began to follow Him, as indigents ought to do. And they cried [and screamed] incessantly: “Son of David, have mercy [and take pity] on us!” [Matthew 9:27].

Now the epithet ‘Son of David’ was a title for none other than *Méleh Ha Mašiah*, or Christ the [Anointed] Messiah King, Who was to spring forth from the loins of the Prophet King David [II Samuel 7:11–16]. And [yet, again and again] in a most remarkable manner indeed, did these two blind beggars [unexpectedly — but nevertheless openly and vigorously] address Christ as ‘Son of David.’ Now, the promise concerning the Messiah and that He should be called the ‘Son of David,’ was well known and diffused throughout Israel [Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5–6; Amos 9:11; Acts 15:15–16]. Moreover, [and at that point in time], there were present [and persistent] rumors and a widespread expectation that the Messiah's appearing would be imminent. However, these two lowly and blind beggars were [in effect] able to [see or] apperceive [in their hearts] that Jesus was indeed the Christ the Son of the Living God. And this was in response to Divine revelation — for ‘flesh and blood’ did not [and could not] reveal this truth to them [Matthew 16:17]. Therefore, upon apperceiving this Divine truth, they openly and forcefully cried out and thereby made their confession [of Christ] manifest [to all]. They acknowledged and proclaimed that the Lord Jesus Christ had come and that He now walked in the very streets of Capernaum. This was no small undertaking and involved considerable risk. Indeed, their boisterous confession indicated their seemingly general lack of good sense [at least according to the judgment of this world]. For there was potential for a ruinous outcome if their cries would have happened to but aggravate the chief priests and Pharisees, who [because of their own sin and spiritual blindness] denied and opposed the Lord Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding, although these two [blind and miserable] beggars could not see Jesus [or otherwise witness His miracles], they had faith, “and faith comes from

hearing, and hearing [comes] by the word [and message] concerning Christ” [Romans 10:17]. Here, these two lowly beggars [as did St. Didymus the Blind and St. Matrona of Moscow, who were bereft of physical sight] were gifted with true vision. The ‘eyes of their understanding’ or *nous* [that is, the apperceptive power and faculty of the soul] were so exceedingly enlightened so as to discern the great mysteries of God ‘that are [otherwise] hidden from the wise and prudent’ [Matthew 11:25–27].

The very words [and petition] “Have mercy [and take pity] on us” [in Greek, *eléison imás*] is also of great significance, for it had been foretold that the ‘Son of David’ would be compassionate and merciful. And it is written: “He will deliver, [rescue, and protect] the poor and needy when they cry out, and the afflicted and abused [also] who have no helper. Indeed, He will [be kind], have compassion upon, and spare the poor and needy and will save their [lives and] souls [and give them victory]” [Psalms 72:12–13]. And the High Priest Zechariah [who was filled with the Holy Spirit as he offered up incense in the Temple of God] prophesized concerning his son [John the Baptist]: “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High [God]; for you will go before the Lord [Christ] to prepare His ways and to give the knowledge of salvation to His people through the forgiveness of their sins. And because of the compassion and tender mercy of our God, the Sunrise [or Messiah] from on High will dawn and visit us to give light to those who sit [and dwell] in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet [straight] into the way of peace” [Luke 1:76–79]. Therefore, in [Jesus] the ‘Son of David,’ shines the compassion and tender mercy of our God.

Whatever our urgent needs and distresses are, we need nothing except to share in [and partake of] the compassion and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. “For He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own compassion and mercy, by the [cleansing and] washing of regeneration [and new birth] and the renewal in the Holy Spirit” [Titus 3:5]. Whether Jesus cures our sicknesses or not, if He has but compassion and mercy on us, we have enough. “But God, who is [so very] rich in [compassion and] mercy, and out of the great love with which He has loved us, even when we were [spiritually] dead [and separated from Him] because of our [sins and] trespasses, He made us [spiritually] alive together with Christ [for it is by grace, His undeserved favor and mercy], that

you have been saved from God's judgment" [Ephesians 2:4–5]. As to the particular instances and methods of His mercy, we may safely and wisely yield or surrender ourselves to the will and the wisdom of Christ. It becomes those that are under the same affliction, to concur in the same prayers for relief.

Fellow sufferers should be joint petitioners. The blind men did not each of them say for himself: 'Have mercy on me.' But both interceded one for another, crying: 'Have mercy on us.' For Jesus said: "Again, I say to you, if but two of [My true disciples and followers] are [in harmony and of one mind], and agree [on earth] about anything for which they ask [that is, in accordance with the will of God], it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" [Matthew 18:19–20].

The insistent and pressing demand in the request [of the blind beggars] is also to be noted, for they followed Him, and incessantly cried out. It seems that Jesus did not take notice of them initially, which tested their resolve and faith, which proved to be strong. This in turn would vitalize their prayers, and make Christ's cures more valued, for this is often so when the answer does not come at the first instant. This is a lesson for us, for it teaches us to continue imperative [and importune] in prayer. We must always 'pray, and faint not' [Luke 18:1].

The Apostle Paul writes: "Always be joyful [and rejoice]. Pray continually [without ceasing], and give thanks in all circumstances [every situation]. For this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" [I Thessalonians 5:16–18]. And although the answers do not come presently, yet we must wait, and follow providence, even in the midst of those things that would seem to contradict our prayers. "For the Lord is good to those who [hope and] wait [confidently] for Him, to the soul that seeks Him [on the authority of His word]" [Lamentations 3:25].

Jesus would not heal them publicly in the street. This was a cure He would keep private [Matthew 9:28–29]. But they followed after Him, and when He went into the house, they came to Him. Christ's doors are always open to believing and importunate petitioners. Indeed, it seemed rude [on their part] to rush into the house after Him when He desired to retire. But such is the tenderness of the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were not more bold than welcome.

“And when Jesus had entered the house [and the blind men had come unto Him], Jesus said: Do you believe that I am able to do this [and make you see again]? They said to Him: ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying: ‘According to your faith be it done to you’” [Matthew 9:28–29].

Christ drew a confession of faith from the blind men [upon this occasion] as He will also draw a confession of faith from us. When the blind beggars came to Jesus for mercy, He asked them: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” Faith is the great precondition of Christ’s favors [and blessings]. Those who expect to receive mercy from God must firmly believe in His Christ. Whatsoever we would have Jesus do for us, we must be fully assured that He is able to do [or perform] the grace requested. Those blind beggars followed Christ. Yes! They followed Him and [all the while] cried desperately, but yet the great question was: “Do you believe?”

Nature may bring forth the quality of being fervent and tearful [in some men], but it is only grace that can work faith, and spiritual blessings are only obtained by [and through] faith. The blind beggars had proclaimed their faith in Christ as ‘Son of David.’ They had proclaimed their faith in His mercy, but Christ now demands that they likewise make a profession of faith in His power. “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” [Matthew 9:28]. Do you believe that I am able to bestow this request? Do you believe that I am able to give sight to the blind? And, do you believe that I am able to cure the palsy and raise the dead?

It is to our benefit to be specific in the exercise of faith, [and concurrently] to apply the general assurances of God’s power and goodwill, and the general promises [of His love, compassion, and mercy] to our particular exigencies. All shall work for good: “For we know [with great confidence] that in everything God works together [as in a plan] for the good for those who love God and who are called according to His purpose” [Romans 8:28]. Therefore, believe [as did the blind beggars] that Christ is able, not only to prevail with God for your request [or petition] as a prophet, but that He is able to do it by His own power. They demonstrated that they believed in Jesus as the ‘Son of David,’ and moreover, as the ‘Son of God.’ For it is God’s prerogative alone to open the eyes of the blind. And it is written: “The Lord [gives sight and] opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are [in distress and] bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous

[and the upright of heart]” [Psalm 146:8]. God makes the seeing eye: “Then the Lord said: “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? [Exodus 4:11]. And although Job “was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame” [Job 29:15], he could not give eyes to the blind. After taking everything into consideration the following question is put to us: Do we believe that Christ is able to fulfill our every request and petition? To believe in the power of Christ is not only to assure ourselves of it, but to commit ourselves to it, and to encourage ourselves in it.

“Hear now this, O foolish people without heart [or understanding], who have eyes [and are not physically disabled] but [are still yet blind and] see not” [Jeremiah 5:21]. In the words of the playwright John Heywood [c. 1497–1580]: “There are none so blind as those who will not see.” And Jesus said: “For judgment I came into this world [to separate those who believe in Me from those who reject Me, and to declare judgment on those who choose to be separated from God] that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” [John 9:39]. The Apostle Paul writes: “For the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep [and prevent] them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the [exact] image of God” [II Corinthians 4:4].

Jesus said to the blind beggars: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” And they immediately [and without hesitation] answered: “Yes, Lord” [Matthew 9:28]. And again, although Jesus had kept them in suspense awhile, and had not helped them immediately, they honestly imputed that [delay] to His wisdom, not to His weakness, and were still confident of His ability. The treasures of mercy that are laid up in the power of Christ, are laid out and wrought for those that trust in Him. “How great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who [in reverence] fear You, which You have prepared [and stored up] for those who trust [and have confidence] in You in the presence of the sons of men!” [Psalms 31:19]. Then He touched their eyes, saying: “According to your faith be it done to you, and their eyes were opened” [Matthew 9:29–30]. Christ touched their eyes, to encourage their faith, which [by His delay] He had tested, and furthermore to show that He gives sight to blind souls by the operations of His grace accompanying the word [through the anointing of the eyes with eye-salve]. Jesus put the cure upon

their faith. This speaks to His knowledge of the sincerity of their faith and His acceptance and approbation of it.

It is a great comfort to true believers that the Lord Jesus Christ knows their faith and is well pleased with it. And although it be weak, though others do not discern it, though they themselves are ready to question it sometimes, it is known to Jesus. Those who apply themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ shall be dealt with according to their faith, not according to their capricious likings or inclinations, nor according to their formal announcements, but according to their faith. Unbelievers and believers in name only, cannot expect to find any favor with God, but true believers [or disciples] may be sure to find all that favor which is offered in the Gospel. Our comfort [of grace] ebbs and flows in harmony with our stronger or weaker faith. We are not confined in Christ — let us not then confine ourselves.

And Jesus sternly charged them: “See that no one knows it. But they went away and spread His fame through all that district” [Matthew 9:30–31]. He gave them this charge to give us an example of that humility and lowliness of mind that Jesus would have us to learn from Him. In the good we do, we must not seek our own praise, but only the glory of God. “So, whether you eat or drink [or whatsoever you do], do all to the glory of God” [I Corinthians 10:31]. Our principal concern is to be of beneficial use rather than to be known and observed. For it is written: “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a faithful and trustworthy man?” [Proverbs 20:6]. Thus, Christ seconded the rule He had given. “But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand does” [Matthew 6:3]. The silencing of those who should proclaim the gracious works of Christ is a judgment against wicked people. “For men will be lovers of self, [narcissistic, and self-focused]. They will be lovers of money [and impelled by greed]. They will be proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, and profane. Furthermore, they will be unloving, calloused, inhuman, [and devoid of natural human affection], implacable, [gossips, and] slanderers, profligates [and devoid of self-control], fierce [and brutal], haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” [II Timothy 3:2–4].

Therefore, it is right and just that Christ denies the means of conviction to those that are obstinate in their infidelity and shrouds the light from those that shut

their eyes against it. He also did it in discretion [and for His own preservation because His hour had not yet come]. And the more Jesus was proclaimed, the more jealous the rulers of the Jews were of His growing fame among the people. “And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say: This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet” [Luke 11:29]. But honor is like the shadow, which, as it flees from those that follow it, so it follows those that flee from it. The two beggars [who were now cured], in their jubilation, spread abroad His fame. This was more an act of zeal, than of prudence; and though it may be excused as honestly meant for the honor of Christ, yet it cannot be justified, being done against a particular and specific order [or command]. Whenever we profess to direct our intention to the glory of God, we must make sure that the action is according to the will of God.

“And as they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to Him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the crowds marveled, saying: Never was anything like this seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said: He casts out demons by the prince of demons” [Matthew 9:32–34]. Jesus had barely dismissed the two [formerly] blind men when He is met with a dumb man. See the malice of Satan against mankind, and in how many different ways it is exhibited. This man’s dumbness was the effect of his being possessed by a demon. Jesus’ cure was very sudden and when the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke. Christ’s cures strike at the root, and remove the effect by taking away the cause. On this occasion, by breaking Satan’s power in the soul, the tongue was loosened and the lips opened.

The multitudes marveled, and well they should have. And though few believed, many wondered. The admiration of the common man is sooner raised than any other affection. But when the Pharisees could not gainsay, dispute, or deny the convincing evidence of these miracles, they resorted to blasphemy, saying: “He casts out demons by the prince of demons” [Matthew 9:34]. The blasphemous Pharisees attributed the origin of Jesus’ miracles to the devil, as if said miracles had been wrought by agreement and collusion — a suggestion that is horrid beyond expression! On this occasion, Jesus ignored their blasphemy. And “He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every

infirmity” [Matthew 9:35]. Notwithstanding, at a later occasion, Christ did indeed respond to the Pharisees. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan [and his demons], he is divided against himself [and disunited]; how then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul [or Satan], by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you ... He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the [Holy] Spirit will not be forgiven. And whosoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit [by attributing the miracles done by Me to Satan] will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” [Matthew 12:25–28; 30–32]. Therefore, such ‘[wicked, malicious, and] evil men [together with other deceivers] wax worse and worse, ever deceiving and ever being deceived’ [II Timothy 3:13]. For this is both their sin and their punishment. For although the previous challenges and accusations of the pernicious Jews to Christ were spiteful enough [in themselves], yet there was at least some semblance of piety, purity, and devotion in them, albeit feigned [Matthew 9:3–14].

However, this blasphemy breathed nothing but malice and falsehood, and hellish enmity in the highest degree — it was therefore diabolical — and was immediately and justly [judged and] pronounced unpardonable by Christ [Matthew 12:31–32]. In contrast to those dastardly Jews who dared to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit [and thereby received condemnation], the Apostle Paul writes to all those who seek Christ’s bountiful compassion and mercy, saying: “We have spoken openly to you, and our heart is [enlarged and] opened wide. There is no limit to our affection for you, but you are limited in your own affection [for us]. In the same way as a fair exchange [for our love toward you], I am speaking as [I would] to children — open wide [your hearts] to us also. Do not be unequally yoked [or bound] together with unbelievers [and do not make alliances with them]. For what fellowship [or partnership] has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial [or Satan]? Or what part has a believer [in common] with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living

God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters — says the Lord Almighty” [II Corinthians 6:11–18].

If you have not believed [in the Lord Jesus Christ] unto salvation [and do not have a personal relationship with Him], you stand in great need. For your heart has been broken many times over and is full of heaviness and despair. You have looked, waited, and hoped for sympathy, compassion, pity, and consolation from your [loved ones and] fellows but have found none. There is but one remaining solution for you. You must repent and submit now to the Lord Jesus Christ and He will mercifully ‘come to your aid, deliver you from sin, heal your broken heart, and save you, for He is compassionate and merciful, and loves mankind [Psalm 103:8].

Otherwise, you may have believed in Christ but yet stand heartbroken and alone [in this cruel] and compassionless world in which the Divinely instituted law of ‘honor’ [that is, of *besa* or *riječ*] is virtually unknown, and thoughtlessness, apathy, and betrayal are the norm. You need relief. You need the ‘balm [and compassion] of Gilead’ [Jeremiah 8:22]. You need ‘times of refreshing that come from [the presence of] the Lord [and that restore the brokenhearted like a cool soothing wind on a hot day]’ [Acts 3:19]. Know this! Although the ‘world is without compassion,’ provision has been made, and Christ will come to ‘heal the brokenhearted [who turn to Him].’ He will ‘bind up [and bandage] their wounds, healing their pain and comforting them in their sorrows’ [Psalms 147:3].

Receive then with meekness the implanted Word [of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ], which is able ‘to save your soul to the uttermost’ and moreover, to deliver you from heartache, suffering, and sorrows [James 1:21]. For it is written: “Is anyone among you afflicted [and suffering]? Let him pray. Is anyone joyful [and merry]? Let him sing psalms and praises to God, not worldly songs. Is any among you [spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, or physically] sick? Let him call the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven” [James 5:13–15].

Come now, draw near, and respond to His invitation in haste. For ‘now is [indeed] the acceptable time, and today is the day of salvation [and deliverance]’ [II Corinthians 6:2].

Now to that same Christ [Who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds] belong glory, might, honor, and worship, together with His Father Who is without beginning, and with the Holy, Good, and Life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.