



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

Join us for prayer and fellowship.

**Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm
Services are primarily in English.**

Next Services

Saturday, June 30th

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

Sunday, July 1st

**Matins
9:00 am**

**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

All welcome!



This beautiful and prayerful icon of Christ the Light of the World has been commissioned for St. Olympia Orthodox Church by a member of the parish. It is written [painted] through the hand of our beloved “resident” iconographer, Mother Sophronia. The icon invites worshippers to remember these words of our Lord as they enter the narthex of our chapel.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel: Matthew 8:5-13

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

How strong is your trust in God? Is it unwavering, focused, immovable, steady, oblivious to obstacles? Or is it like a delicate flower, vulnerable to even the smallest disturbance by a blowing wind, and does even the slightest variation in temperature or moisture cause it to wilt? For most of us, I suspect, the truth lies somewhere in between. We’d like a stronger faith. But how do we get it? How can we strengthen our faith, not just for troubled times, but also for when we have a difficult time under normal conditions? Sometimes life just goes nuts, not with crises, but with all the everyday stuff hitting us all at once; we feel overwhelmed by things coming at us from all directions. And as the pressures get stronger, we sometimes find our faith getting weaker. So is it possible to have a strong, unwavering faith? If so, how?

To begin, it is the Holy Spirit alone Who can grow our faith within us, because faith, real trust, is a gift of grace given by and through the Holy Spirit. Note how 1 John 4:4 says “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” It’s not something within us, like our own resources or our own will-power, but Someone Who develops and deepens out trust in God. That’s why the Church bids us begin our daily prayers, morning and evening, and just about every service with “O Heavenly King,” asking for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we have to grasp that it’s not the size of our faith that counts, but the Object of our faith: the risen and victorious Lord Jesus Christ. What matters is not the amount of my trust, but the ability of the One in Whom I place my trust. In Matthew 17:20, the Lord Jesus tells us, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move,” because it’s not me who’s moving that mountain; it’s God. And as God asks Abraham in Genesis 18:14, after 90-year-old Sarah fell on her face laughing at the Lord’s promise that she’d bear a son, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?”

But in today’s Gospel, Matthew 8:5-13, we learn our role in grasping just Who the object of our faith is, firstly by knowing the authority of Jesus. “Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him.” A centurion in the Roman army was a career soldier in command of 100 men; and centurions were the army’s backbone, maintaining order and executing orders. They were the guys who got the job done---in part because of their authority. When the centurion spoke, he spoke with the emperor’s authority; so his orders were to be obeyed without question. A soldier disobeying an order was to be executing immediately and without pity.

Luke’s Gospel says this centurion was also a “God-fearer,” a Gentile who believed in the God of Israel, took part in synagogue worship, supported the synagogue financially, and kept at least part of the Law of Moses. So this centurion had some grasp of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah, and likely saw in Jesus the fulfilling of those prophecies. And he was spiritually “in tune” enough to “get” immediately the authority of Jesus. Intuitively, he grasped that the kind of authority he himself exercised over his command, Jesus exercised over life and death; that just as he exercised the emperor’s authority, Jesus exercised God’s authority; so an order from Jesus was an order from God. And good soldier that he was, the centurion didn’t question that authority but simply wanted to obey it.

Note also how the centurion came to Jesus, “pleading with Him, saying, ‘Lord my servant is lying at home, paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.’” But the word translated here as “servant” isn’t the usual *doulos*, which means “slave,” but *pais*, whose primary meaning is “child.” The centurion looks upon his slave, not as just a piece of property, but as a person and member of his household. He’s genuinely concerned for this man. So he approaches the matter like a soldier: he goes to Jesus seeking an ally with the most firepower. But when “Jesus said to him, ‘I will come and heal him,’” the centurion objects: “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant shall be healed.” Why? Is he having sudden doubts? No; just the opposite! He has total confidence that if Jesus just says the word, it’s a done deal. That’s why he says, “For I also am a man under authority.” When he gives an order, he knows it’ll be obeyed instantly and without question. And he figures that if he has that much authority, how much more must Jesus have!

And that’s our challenge, isn’t it? When we bring to Jesus our needs, concerns, hurts, fears, whatever, do we trust that He really does have authority over our problem? Or do we fear that our problem has authority over Him? We’d do well to remember how, in Matthew 28:18, the risen Jesus assures His disciples that “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” And if He has all authority, how would He not be able to take care of our concern? As the centurion’s word was law to his soldiers, the Lord’s word is law to all creation. And the centurion had no problem trusting that Jesus could heal even at a distance, probably because he’d heard in the synagogue the words of Jeremiah 23:23, “‘Am I a God near at hand [i.e., not only when I’m nearby],’ says the LORD, ‘and not a God far off?’” First, we have to know the authority of Jesus.

Secondly, we have to know the willingness of Jesus. Do you feel like you have to beg and plead with God in order to be heard? Then note how, in response to the centurion’s straightforward request, Jesus simply says “I will come and heal him.” If Jesus said that to you or to me, would we trust that response? Maybe. But sometimes we’d rather talk about our problems than move beyond them to a solution. Or sometimes the answer to our prayer requires more effort than we’re willing to put in. “Oh, Lord, please give me a job, any job!” “OK, you got it! Just realize that from now on you get up at 4:30 am to be at work on time.” “Oh Lord, please give me a different job!” Or sometimes we’re like Peter in Luke 5:8 where, after witnessing a miracle, falls to his knees and says “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Experiencing the Lord’s favor always brings us nose-to-nose with our own sinfulness and unworthiness, and His holiness. Well, the centurion could’ve let his pride, doubt, money, language, culture, distance, time, power and/or position stand between him and Jesus; but he didn’t. He perceived the Lord’s willingness to help and held on to it for dear life. Is there anything keeping you or me from laying hold of the Lord’s highest willingness for us? Is there anything keeping us from knowing and affirming that He really can and really wants to meet our real need? If it’s our own sin, God’s solution is repentance, confession, and His forgiveness; for “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.” If it’s doubt, then let’s remember that He means exactly what He says in 1 Corinthians 2:9, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

Know the authority of Jesus; know the willingness of Jesus; and, lastly, know that the Lord can work with us where we are. Jesus knew the centurion didn’t have the same religious upbringing as the Jews, but was from a totally different background. Did that matter to Jesus? Nope. He dealt with the centurion in a language and way he’d understand. The soldier wanted and needed Jesus to simply “speak a word” and heal the servant. So Jesus didn’t argue. He just said, “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” Now, sometimes you and I pray but don’t really expect an answer. We figure that since we’re not smart enough, holy enough, whatever enough, Jesus cannot or will not help. Or sometimes what we’re praying for is only a partial answer, because we fear we can’t handle the total answer. But our limitations are not now, nor have they ever been, nor can they or will they ever be God’s limitations. Jesus is able to work with us even with all our idiosyncrasies and shortcomings. And we need to let Him! We need to focus, not on what we’re unable to do, but on what He is able to do, because that’s usually where Jesus meets us: not at the pinnacle of our own strength, but at the deepest point of our real need.

We can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in strengthening our faith to the point where, as the gift of God’s grace, we have faith as unwavering as that of this soldier: by realizing that our faith is centered, not on us, but on Jesus; by accepting the truth that He’s glad to answer our prayers according to what He knows is best for us; and by realizing that everything---including us---doesn’t have to be perfect for Jesus to work with us, if only we’ll let Him. Ah, but will we? It’s your move...and mine too.

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