

From the desk of Fr. Matthew

The following is a transcript from the sermon delivered on Sunday, August 16

One of the things I love most about preaching is that the Gospel speaks to me differently at different times in my life. This is true for anyone who reads the bible as well. But preaching is a very personal relationship with scripture; it's finding a way to communicate Jesus Christ to others. There are a number of different ways to look at this morning's Gospel (Matthew 17:14-23).

At that time, a man came up to Him and kneeling before Him said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting." As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.

This Gospel passage illustrates a number of different things relevant to our lives today: (1) The Importance of Faith; (2) How faith is something in which even the Apostles struggled; (3) The importance of prayer and fasting; (4) The healing miracles of Jesus.

As I was reading the Gospel this week, I was struck by all of these things. But an aspect of this passage I had never focused on really became prominent for me: The epileptic's father. Here is a man who is striving to help his son. He comes to Christ on his knees because the disciples couldn't heal his son even though they had the authority to do so. So this father brings his son to Jesus. But Jesus doesn't have very nice things to say about this father: **O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?** The fathers of the Church teach us that these words are directed specifically to the father and not to the Apostles. Christ privately chastises the Apostles a little later in the same passage. What the father of the epileptic boy needed more than a miracle for his son was his personal faith in God.

Parental roles in the Church

I want to focus on this aspect of parenting (and by parenting, I include grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, and every Christian adult that interacts with a child). I'm still acutely aware of the struggles our children are going through after spending three weeks at St. Stephen's Summer Camp. I had the blessing to work with over 250 teenagers from all over our Metropolis, and I was able to hear a number of their confessions. I would really like to better understand our responsibilities as parents and how we as parents and youth works can better prepare our children for the trials and temptations of our modern world.