

Acts 4:13-22 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.*

John 5:17-24 *But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

There is a connection between the readings from Acts and the Gospel of John for today on this Wednesday of the Second Week of Pascha. First we see Jesus speaking with the Jews. If we back up to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. John, we read about how Jesus healed the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda. Remember, this man had been paralyzed for 38 years and could never drag himself down the pool to be healed when the Angel of the Lord stirred the waters and it was on the Sabbath and during the Feast of Weeks (and Old Testament version of Pentecost celebrating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai). When the paralyzed man was asked by the Jews who healed him, he became a witness for Christ and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And as it says in John 5:16 “For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath.”

So then Jesus speaks to them humbly, but nonetheless telling them the Truth about Himself and the Father. As St. Theophylact points out, God works on the Sabbath, in the sense that the sun rises and sets, the springs & rivers and all living things continue to gush forth and move by God’s Providence—in other words, God energizes and moves all creation. If that were not so, then all creation would cease to exist. So this is what Jesus means by “My Father worketh hitherto and I work.”

St. Theophylact goes on to point out how when Jesus refers to Himself as the Son and God as His Father, this is not the same as an earthly father and earthly son—where the son would be subordinate to his father and be instructed in everything by him. Heretics like Arius interpret this passage in that way—that Jesus Christ was in some way a created being and therefore not equal to God. Yet Jesus shows how He and the Father are one in essence and power and how He is like the Father in all

respects. St. Theophylact even points out that if Arius were correct and Jesus really was merely a created being, not equal to God, why were the Jews so upset with Him, wanting to kill Him because He made Himself equal to God? No, in fact it is because Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, and the Saviour of the race of mankind, that the Jews rejected Him and wanted to kill Him.

When we see Jesus Christ from the true perspective, then these verses make sense and help us understand more fully who Christ really is. However, in the case of benighted heretics, they miss the point completely because they are following their own opinions and ideas and not listening to Christ because they do not have the love of God, but rather the love of themselves is their rule of law.

Then we see the Apostles performing miraculous healings just as Christ did, in this case, St. Peter healing the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (Acts 3). And as they were speaking to the people about how Christ really did rise from the dead and He is the Messiah who was foretold, the priests, captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, laid hands on them and put them in prison. Then they were brought for a trial of sorts in which Annas the high priest, Caiaphas and other family of the high priest were assembled. These leaders of the Jews begin to question Peter and John and when they continue to witness to Jesus Christ and how this lame man was healed in the name of Christ, the Jewish leaders want to silence them and forbid them from speaking about Jesus Christ ever again.

St. John Chrysostom however, compares the Apostles with the Jewish high priests and leaders of the temple; and he asks who has boldness here? In fact, it was the Jews who were afraid of the Apostles and of Christ. It was they who feared the people and in the end, let them go free, since they had no way of denying the miracle.

We have observed that today, many people who have converted to the Orthodox faith, find themselves in similar circumstances. It is quite common that their own friends and family suddenly reject them. Then, as they attempt to live an Orthodox Christian way of life: praying, fasting, doing good deeds; others who call themselves Christian, instead of being happy for them, now try to stop them and impede them in their efforts. An Orthodox Christian at the workplace or some social gathering might avoid meat and dairy products because of the fast of Great Lent or some other fasting day. Some non-Orthodox person asks them why they are not eating meat. When the Orthodox Christian tries to honestly answer their question, explaining that it is a fast day, the non-Orthodox Christian often becomes offended. They may say or think that because their church does not practice fasting and because they consider themselves to be good Christians, there must be something wrong with the Orthodox Church—they must be some kind of weird heretical sect. One can find many similar examples of this sort of thing in other areas of our faith and life.

St. Anthony the Great foresaw this back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when he said, *“A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, ‘You are mad; you are not like us.’”* Despite all this, we can take some consolation that our Lord Jesus Christ was misunderstood by the religious leaders of His time. His disciples have encountered misunderstanding and disbelief over the past 2,000 years. Is it any wonder that we encounter the same thing in our times, if only in a small way? Yet, our Orthodox Faith has survived all this time and has remained unchanged! Glory be to God!