

Bible Study Notes 9-3-2014

Mark 3:20-27

²⁰ *And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.*

²¹ *And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.* ²² *And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.* ²³ *And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?*

²⁴ *And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.* ²⁵ *And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.* ²⁶ *And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.* ²⁷ *No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.*

St. Theophylact says that it was out of envy that they accused Christ of having a demon (and so was “beside” himself). That they wanted to ‘lay hold on Him’ meant that they wanted to tie Him up as they did with those who were demon-possessed...and since they could not say anything against the things that He did, accusing Him of doing these things with the help of the demons was another way they found to slander the miracles.

St. John Chrysostom talks about the passion of envy at some length in his homily about this event. He says that those scribes from Jerusalem were actually worse than the demon which possessed the dumb man, for the demon fled when Christ cast it out, but the scribes were indignant that something good had happened to these men who were healed of blindness and demon-possession (*also see account of this same event in Matt. 12: 22-30*). They tried to slay Him and defame Him. St. Chrysostom goes so far as to say that the sin of envy is worse even than the sin of adultery, “*for the adulterer indeed enjoys some pleasure, such as it is, and in short time accomplishes his proper sin; but the envious man punishes himself and takes vengeance upon himself more than on the person whom he envies, and never ceases from his sin, but is continually engaged in the commission thereof.*”

He describes the sin (or passion) of envy as one who delights in their neighbor’s ills; accounting the calamities of others his own joys and the blessings of others, his own ills...For this turns a man into a devil, this renders one a savage demon. Thus did the first murder arise (when Cain slew Abel)...St. Chrysostom even points out how this was one of the main reasons the very devil himself fell. He says that when God beholds an envious person, He punishes him and the object of the envious, God exalts all the more. An example of this was when the sons of Jacob conspired to rid themselves of their brother Joseph and left him to die; by God’s Providence, Joseph became king of all Egypt, while his brothers suffered famine and peril.

Besides the matter of envy, this Gospel there is also the issue of blasphemy. St. Basil the Great says that “*Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to attribute His operations to the opposite spirit.*” St. Symeon the New Theologian says that the way one does this, is whenever one sees miracles brought about by the Holy Spirit or any of the other divine gifts in any of his brethren—that is compunction or tears, or humility, or divine knowledge, or a word of wisdom from on high or anything else that is bestowed by the Holy Spirit on those who love God...that when those Jews of old (or anyone else for that matter) deny the miracles of the Son of God, they become like unbelievers and those completely uninitiated into the divine mysteries when they hear anything about divine illumination, or of the enlightenment of soul and mind, or of contemplation and freedom from passion, or of humility and tears that are poured out by the working and grace of the Holy Spirit: straightaway the eyes of their hearts are darkened rather than enlightened...They audaciously aver that these things come from the deceit of demons...

This happens all too frequently when anyone tries to do something good that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. People around such a person try to find fault with them and accuse them of wrongdoing or other evil motivations. I have heard people try to defame righteous Holy Fathers, saying that they were once sinners, so how could they possibly ever do anything good? When St. John Maximovitch came to San Francisco as the Archbishop of the Russian Church, work on the new cathedral had ground to a halt and the exposed iron framework that had been erected, was in danger of becoming corroded so that it could possibly have had to be torn down and destroyed. The work on the church construction had stopped because of all sorts of arguments and in-fighting amongst those church members who were supposed to collect the funds and oversee the construction.

Archbishop John labored tirelessly to work through these obstacles and with much effort and prayer, the cathedral was eventually completed. However, corrupt persons tried to accuse St. John Maximovitch of misappropriating funds and other misdeeds and brought a lawsuit against him in a civil court. The judge could even see that this was out of envy and that there was absolutely no factual or material evidence of any wrongdoing and that these charges against Archbishop John were nothing but false accusations. The judge threw the case out and St. John was exonerated, but poor Archbishop John was heartbroken that his own Orthodox people and even clergy and bishops had turned against him.

Orthodox Christians who are trying to practice their faith, should not be surprised when others don't like us or want to falsely accuse us; but remember the Beatitude "*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"