

have faith, but our prayer feeds that faith. Here the father asks Jesus for the faith to believe in his power.

When the healing is performed the boy fell as if dead and Jesus raises him up. The obvious foreshadowing of the resurrection earns this healing a place in our preparation for Pascha. We are raised out of our sins the same way as this boy. Jesus reaches down with his hand and lifts us out of our despair.

In private the apostles ask why they cannot drive out this demon. Jesus again focuses on prayer. There is no magic ritual or formula, the answer is prayer. The parallel account in Matthew adds the words “and fasting.” These are also present in the Byzantine text here in Mark making this most appropriate for the Great Fast timing of this reading. The story ends with a prediction of the passion. With only two weeks until Holy Week we are reminded of the coming sacrifice.

The Hebrews reading ends with the declaration of Jesus as Melchizedek. This king and priest receives the tribute of Abraham. He offers God sacrifice in bread and wine. Jesus is the fulfillment of this sacrifice on the cross. The Eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifice prefigured by Melchizedek.

St. John Chrysostom relates this sacrifice of Christ to the sacrifice of praise and contrite spirit in the Old Testament. We are called on to perform this sacrifice as well. The season of the fast reminds us to sacrifice ourselves for others. The Great Fast is a time to renew the commitment in prayer, fasting and alms giving.

“Shall we then still be indignant, because when we pray to God, we are not heard? Shall we then still be vexed, because when we entreat we do not persuade? Do we not tremble for fear, my beloved? But (you say) I have often given. But do you not always eat? And do you drive away they children often begging of thee?”

John Chrysostom Homily XI on Hebrews

Chrysostom reminds us of our obligations. Just as we ask from God, so must we give of ourselves. The sacrifice of our High Priest Jesus is the example to follow, not just the source of our blessing. The more we give, the more blessing flow towards us.

Steve Puluka

# Scripture in the Great Fast

Saturday

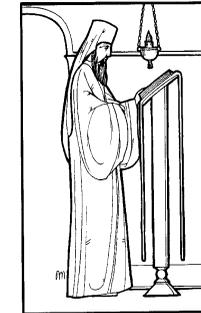
Hebrews 6:9-12

Mark 7:31-37

Sunday

Hebrews 6:13-20

Mark 9:17-31



“For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.”

Hebrews 6:10

## Fourth Weekend of the Great Fast

During the fourth weekend the scripture readings continue our exploration of Old Testament fulfillment and discipleship. The two readings from Hebrews are continuous in chapter six. They explore the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in the Christian community and Christ as the High Priest. During the Great Fast we explore our Jewish roots. We don't shun our spiritual heritage but embrace the past as a way to better understand our current relationship with Christ as a people. The pericopes from Mark's Gospel provide two examples of healing the deaf. This demonstration of power reminds us to open our own ears to the message of Christ.

“My deeds  
have  
drowned me  
in the  
depths of  
the ocean of  
this life; but  
as Jonah in  
the belly of  
the whale, I  
cry out to  
you: Draw  
me up from  
the abyss of  
my sins, I  
pray You, O  
Son and  
Word of  
God”

Saturday  
Matins  
Canon  
Ode 6

Saturday is the third commemoration of those fallen asleep in the Lord as well. The services remind us that the promises of the Lord apply to them too.

“Your promises are beyond expression, O Savior things which eye has not seen nor has ear heard, nor has it occurred to the human heart. In your compassion, grant a share of this to the departed, granting them eternal life.”

Saturday Matins Apostica

Sunday also provides us with a special example of discipleship, St. John Climacus. This monk wrote the great spiritual treatise “The Ladder of Divine Ascent” outlining the path to heaven. This meditation on Jacob's ladder to heaven outlines the acts to perform and avoid in the pursuit of holiness.

## Saturday

Jesus heals the deaf mute by touching both his ears and mouth. This demonstration of power propels the witnesses to proclaim his glory, even when Jesus asks them to remain silent. We are called to be witnesses to the power of God as they were. Discipleship includes bearing witness to the Gospel.

This act of power by healing, demonstrates that Jesus is sent by God. Opening the ears of the deaf and bringing sight to the blind are signs of God's anointed one.

In the act of healing St. Ambrose is reminded of our Christian initiation. At our Baptism & Chrismation we are anointed on the ears and the nostrils. Jesus anoints the deaf mute in a similar way. This anointing by Jesus brings a healing to the body and launches the witnesses.

We are healed of our sins and brought into the life of Christ in our Baptism & Chrismation. This begins our call to witness as well. The Great Fast is a time to renew this baptismal



commitment.

In the Hebrews pericope reminds us that God rewards faithful service, as our opening quote declares. We acknowledge that the Christian life is a struggle, but one must stand firm in the faith. But God will not overlook our sacrifice.

At matins today (left panel) we acknowledge that we sometimes fall short of this ideal. Just as Jonah tried to run from his God given responsibilities and failed, so shall we. But when we call out in prayer from the belly of the fish we will be saved.

The Hebrews passage ends with the admonishment “So that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience obtain the promises.” In this we have the example of those saints that came before us. They remained true to their baptismal call. And in the case of the martyrs, they embrace the same path that Christ walks to the cross.

“Come, let us celebrate the feast of the martyrs; shining brightly with the light of our good deeds, let us praise them with inspired songs: you truly bear the light of Christ on earth, o holy martyrs.”

Saturday Matins Ode 6

## Sunday

Today's healing is also of a dumb man in the Gospel of Mark. But this time the focus is on the inability of the disciples to perform the healing in Jesus name and the lack of faith on the part of the petitioner. In yesterday's story the faith of the crowd is evident in their reaction. Today, the apostles are powerless and the father begs for more faith. In his homily on this pericope, St. Augustine meditates on the relationship between faith and prayer (right panel). We pray because we

“Where faith  
fails, prayer  
perishes.  
For who  
prays for  
that in  
which he  
does not  
believe?..So  
then in order  
that we may  
pray, let us  
believe, and  
let us pray  
that this  
same faith  
by which we  
pray may  
not falter.”

Augustine  
Sermons  
on NT  
lessons 65