

Fifth Sunday of Lent - Can Ye Drink of the Cup That I Drink of?

Mark 10:32b-45

*From The Explanation of the Gospel of St. Mark
by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria*

32-34. And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem: and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him: and the third day He shall rise again.

Why does He foretell the things that will happen to Him? To prepare and to calm the minds of the disciples, so that having heard of these things beforehand they would more easily endure them, and not be overwhelmed all at once in their anguish. He also foretold these things so that they would know that He suffered them of His own will. Although He knows these things beforehand, and is able to flee from them, He does not do so, and thus making it abundantly clear that He willingly gives Himself over to His sufferings. The Lord takes the disciples aside privately to speak with them alone. For His Passion is a mystery to be revealed only to those closest to Him. And this is why on the road He leads the way before them all, wanting to separate His disciples from the rest of the crowd. But also, by leading the way, He shows that He hastens to His Passion, and does not evade His death which is for our salvation. Although He lists all these sorrowful things that will happen, yet there is one consolation, that He will rise on the third day.

35-39. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we want that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall ask. And He said unto them, What do ye want that I should do for you? They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto Him, We can.

Another Evangelist says that the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Christ. [Matt. 20:20] It is likely that both events took place. The apostles were embarrassed, and had their mother go first, and then they themselves approached Christ in private. This is what the Evangelist means here when he says that they *come unto Him*, that they approach Him in private, apart from

the others. Let us learn what it was they asked. They thought that His going up to Jerusalem meant that He was going to ascend the throne of an earthly kingdom, and that after He had become king He would suffer those things which He said He would suffer. With this understanding, they are asking to sit at His right hand and His left. This is why the Lord rebukes them for asking for something foolish. *Ye know not what ye ask*, He says. You are thinking that My kingdom is an earthly kingdom, and you are asking for an earthly throne. But it is not so; rather, these things are beyond your understanding. To sit at My right hand is something so great that it goes beyond what even the angelic hosts can do. You are craving honor and glory, but I am calling you to die. By *baptism* and *cup* He means the cross. For a cup of wine is something a man gladly accepts, and it quickly puts him to sleep. And baptism is something which is done to cleanse sins. But James and John gave their promise without understanding what He said, thinking that He was speaking of an actual cup of wine, and the washing of the body which the Jews performed before they ate.

39-40. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized with shall ye be baptized: but to sit at My right hand and at My left hand is not Mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

Martyrdom, He is saying, will be yours, and you will die for Truths sake. [For bold confession of the Truth James was beheaded in Jerusalem in 45 AD, and John was cruelly tortured in Rome and then exiled to the island of Patmos. Tr.] But to sit at My right hand and at My left is not Mine to give. Two questions may be asked: first, has it been prepared for anyone to sit there? Second, is the Master of all unable to bestow this seat? In answer we say that no one will sit at His right or at His left. Although in many places of Scripture you hear mention of sitting upon a seat in heaven [Mt. 19:28, Lk. 13:29, Eph. 2:6, etc.], understand that this refers to great honor, not a chair. *It is not Mine to give* has this meaning: it is not for Me, the Just Judge, to bestow this honor as a favor, for that would not be just. Instead, this honor has been prepared for those who have contested and struggled for it. It is as if a just king had set a day for a contest of athletes, and then some of his friends come to him and say, "Give us the crowns." The king would say, "The crowns are not mine to give; rather, a crown is prepared for that contestant who shall compete and win." So too with you, O sons of Zebedee, you shall be martyrs for My sake; but if there is one who, along with martyrdom, exceeds you in every virtue, he shall precede you in honor.

41-45. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are thought to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be

slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

The disciples are still subject to human weaknesses, and here they are stung with envy. This is why the ten were displeased with the two. When did they begin to be indignant? When they realized they had not been received by the Lord, and thought they had been pushed away. As long as the ten were shown honor by the Lord, it did not bother them that the Lord held these two in special honor. But here when they see these two asking for honor, the others could no longer endure it. Although they act in this imperfect way now, later you will see each one of them conceding the first place of honor to the other. Christ heals them, first calming them by calling them to Himself, and then showing them that to grasp for honors and to desire the chief place is the behavior of Gentiles. For the Gentile princes lord it over others in a tyrannical and domineering manner. But it is not so with My disciples, He says; instead let him who would be great serve all the others, for the mark of a great soul is to endure all things and to serve everyone. The example of this is near at hand: the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served but to serve, and, what is even greater, He came to give His life as a ransom for many. What could be greater and more marvelous than a man who not only serves, but even dies for the sake of the one he serves? Yet the Lords serving and His humble lowering of Himself to be with us has become the exaltation and the glory of Him and all creation. Before He became man, He was known only to the angels; but after His incarnation and crucifixion, His glory is even greater and He reigns over all the earth.