

Have a grateful heart. (Num11: 4-29, Jas 4:7-13)

* Although today is not the Season of Advent, but the breath of its coming is already in the air. The weather is getting colder, the daylight is shorter and we are older. The most unlikely things from this list, I would address, is the process of dying. When the season of opportunities is gone a man finds his physical property in poor condition. But as far as I know this fact doesn't make the aged people angry. The younger generations also don't get mad in view of the seasonable changing, for example, when sunny days turn into cold winter, or the daylight is getting shorter. Significantly, these people accept what they don't like without complaint! But contrary to this peaceful acceptance of nasty things, the lectionary for today introduces a large spectrum of discontents and bitter complaints. It is not a secret that intimate love of the Lord abides with cheerful, thankful and humble hearts. On the other hand, if Christians crave for material blessings and follow their carnal heart's desires, they displease God, they become one company with rebellious Israel.

* Now let's ask the Lord to remove from us carnal desires but grant us thankful hearts. We pray, *dear Heavenly Father, we give thanks to you for the priceless treasure of your fatherhood in caring and nourishing our physical needs. But there is nothing more worthy in the world than the forgiveness of sins and acceptance as the beloved sons and daughters by virtue of the innocent suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, our God. We pray, save us from excessive desires for food, money and anger but grant us neither poverty nor riches, also feed us with the food that is needful for our souls and bodies. In your precious hands we commit these petitions, ever living God, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen*

* The reading from (Num11: 4-29) can be seen as the double use of a lesson. It warned us from following after the footprints of rebellious people who were willing not to suffer a hardship designed by God for the sake of freedom. Secondly, it teaches us that we are very dependable. As for the clergy it is absolutely necessary to be open for the exceptional grace in order to be able to carry the shortcomings and spiritual childishness of the people in whom they are in charge. To prove this double point let's start from the beginning with the (vv.4-6). The people said, *Who will give us meat to eat?* By such a provoking question the children of Israel challenged Moses to intercede before God on behalf of their carnal desire. They cried out, *We remember, the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength*

is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at. Friends, should this misfortune be a matter of death and life? It shouldn't! God leads his people to the Promised Land through wilderness! It is marked not only by lack of luxury but there is nothing of everything for life supporting! In spite of this fact the Israelites were always supplied with food, water and clothing. God protected them from the cold, heat, starvation and from hostile neighbors. See, even though manna was a monotonous food, it was still a very healthy food, rich in nutrition, having a wide range of vitamins and minerals. Beside this fact, manna was delicious, *the taste of it was like the taste of honey cakes baked with oil,* (v.8). But the cry for spicy- crunchy food continued and this made Moses sick; after all his maturity left him and he complained too. *Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?* He prayed, *For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me,* (vv.13,14). Friends, the lesson for today warns us from being ungrateful and from annoying God with wrong petitions. This life for Christians is like the wilderness for Israel; here we experience many unpleasant things and persons but it doesn't mean that we have the right to judge and complain. *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy,* (Jas 4:12).

* Friends, don't mind if after this strong admonishing we decide to take a break. While you are resting I will tell you a Russian fairy tale. Believe me, it is worthy to be heard, even a few times. This fairy tale was written not just for fun it also pronounces judgment over the human carnal desires and displeasures; it exalts those who don't complain. Here it is.

* There were an old single man and his daughter, Dashenyka, whose mother died some years ago. By chance the man wedded an older woman who also had a daughter, Mirka. The woman spoiled her own daughter by giving her whatever her heart desired; but the stepdaughter Dashenyka she treated rudely. She watched her closely and diligently hoping to find something wrong in her duties. She made her work long and hard. One day the old woman made up her mind to get rid of the stepdaughter once and for all. She ordered her miserable husband: "Take your daughter into the biting cold of the forest and leave her there, or I myself will kick her out."

The old man grieved and wept about his daughter but couldn't help her because he was very helpless to stand against his wife's anger. So he brought the girl into the frozen forest as he was told. Oh, poor Dashenyka, she was left alone at the cold remote place without food and warm clothing. Some time later there was the Father Frost, Morozko leaping from tree to tree and by occasion came upon the girl. At first Morozko wanted to freeze her life out with his icy grip. He rested against her and whispered, "Are you warm, my lass?" "Welcome, my dear Morozko. Yes, I am qui-i-te warm," said Dashenyka with a trembling voice. It surprised me, thought Morozko, the girl didn't complain! "I'd like to give her a warm fur coat and downy comforter instead of icy grip." Soon Dashenyka was covered with warm cloth. For awhile she was asked again, "Are you warm now, my lass?" "Welcome again, my dear Morozko. Yes, I am very warm." Indeed, now she was warmed. Then, Morozko brought her a box to sit on and after that he gave her silver and gold jewelry to wear, with enough extra jewels to fill the box on which she was sitting. Meanwhile the old woman told her husband to go back into the forest to bring the body of his poor daughter. The man drove fast to the forest to the place where his daughter was left. Contrary to his hopeless expectation he found Dashenyka seated on the box, wrapped in a sable coat, alive and cheerful.

After appearing at home, the old woman saw her stepdaughter, alive and dressed beautifully. She was greatly surprised but, after seeing the treasures from the Father Frost, she was surprised even more. "Harness the horse," you old goat, the woman said, "Take Mirka to that very place and leave her there."

The old man did as he was told. Unlike Dashenyka, Mirka was dressed very warmly.

She was instructed to pretend to be as cold as stone. In a short while, Morozko came by her. "How are you doing, sweetie?" He asked. "Are you blind?" she replied. "Can't you see that my hands and feet are quite numb? You are beside the point, stupid old man! You better bring me better the box of gold jewelry and hurry up!"

Dawn had hardly broken the next day when the old woman woke her husband and told him to bring back her beloved daughter, adding: "Be careful with the box of jewels." The old man obeyed and went to fetch the girl. After a short while, the sound of a man arriving came from the yard. The woman quickly left the hut to meet her

daughter. She rushed forward and pulled aside the sleigh's cover. To her horror, she saw the body of her daughter, frozen and dead. She began wailing and berating, but it was all in vain.

Later, Dashenyka married a neighbor, had children, and lived happily. Now and then the old single man visited his daughter and taught his grandchildren how to respect the Old Man.

* Friends, the personages we met in the fairy tale are quite different by virtue of their behavior towards each other and to the One who can supply life or take it out. Significantly the old woman and her daughter from the fairy tale easily fit into one company with the sons of Israel in their complaining and wailing.

The (v.1) of our text says that such behavior displeased God. *When the LORD heard the wailing, his anger burned, and so the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outer parts of the camp,* (Num 11:1). Friends, isn't it a strong warning for Christians if they habitually complain regarding things that God already set up for them? The (v.10) says that the Israelites' complaining made God exceedingly angry. In the course of all these remarks we conclude that thankful and contented persons please God and they will be rewarded; but those who complain constantly should change their attitude or they will not see God in glory.

* Now we are ready to make the final step of our double use in a lesson. As I said before, Moses also lost his temper and complained. But his dissatisfaction was met without anger. Instead of the fire, God sent the Holy Spirit upon 70 elders whom he charged along with Moses the physical and spiritual needs of his people, (v.17). Starting from that moment God continued to send his Spirit upon the leaders and prophets so that without complaint they were able to carry the weakness and spiritual immaturity of God's flock. Among those leaders we've heard the voice of the apostle James; it sounds loudly today as it was never before. James says, *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge,* (Jas 4:11). Friends we would be helpless in following James' admonishing if God would not give us the Holy Spirit. Count the numerous blessings God generously provides daily, and enjoy everything we have from God and be grateful. To the Lord Jesus Christ we give all honor and glory. Beloved abide in peace.

Amen.