

In Capernaum, Jesus preached about the nearness of the kingdom and the necessity of repentance and faith. Jesus is very impressed with the faith of those who lower a paralytic from the roof into the crowded room. “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to him, “Child, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5). No matter how frail and fragile our bodies may be, the soul is of prime importance and thus the forgiveness of sins is a most impressive miracle.

The scribes would beg to differ. Throughout the Gospels there are a series of confrontations between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. They do not accept Jesus as the Son of God. They do not believe he is the promised Messiah. They view every action and every word with suspicion. In short, they lack faith. To hold on to power, they will in time plot to have Jesus crucified. It is hard to reason with individuals when they are convinced that they have a lock on the truth and everyone else is wrong.

Jesus came to save all of humanity and so he does his best to challenge their wrong thinking. Knowing their ill thoughts and calling them on it should be proof enough for the scribes. But Jesus goes one step further. He asks, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’?” (Mk 2:9). Jesus does his best to help them move forward in their limited faith.

We too can be hardheaded like the scribes. Jesus forgives sins every day and yet people are more impressed by miracles. We need miracles to remind us of the value of the most vulnerable lives and that God continues to respond to faith with miracles that echo our Gospel today. “Rise, pick up your mat and walk?” (Mk 2:9).

Within the womb, the unborn child’s umbilical cord had tightened during the final stages of labor. He was blue and lifeless when the doctors delivered him. Although he had no heartbeat, the doctors tried everything to try and revive the child.

The boy’s mother Bonnie was a woman of faith. All throughout her pregnancy she had prayed for a healthy child. She prayed especially for the spiritual health of her unborn child asking God through the intercession of Archbishop Fulton Sheen. Although Fulton Sheen grew up to be an internationally renowned bishop, his boyhood was spent in El Paso, Illinois just down the road from the Engstrom family.

Bonnie explains: “I started asking ... on a daily basis, for Fulton Sheen’s prayers, for his intercession in the life of my child and in our marriage -- to walk with us and to walk with my son, that he would be a lifelong Catholic who would love God and love his faith, that he would be a man of integrity.” Bonnie’s faith was put to the test in the delivery room as the doctors tried without success to revive her still born son. With the help of the Holy Spirit, she continued to pray for a miracle repeating over and over and over again the name of Fulton Sheen. 61 minutes after birth, just when the doctors were going to call the time of death, the infant’s heart began to beat.ⁱ

Doctors told the family their boy was alive but that he was blind and paralyzed. “In taking on human flesh, dwelling among us, and sacrificing his very life for our redemption, Christ reveals the profound dignity of *every* human person. This God-given dignity does not change with our stage of life, abilities, level of independence, or any other varying circumstance. Rather, it is rooted in the permanent fact that each of us is made in the image and likeness of God, created to share in the very life of God himself.”ⁱⁱ

In the days, weeks and months that followed, James Fulton Engstrom made astounding progress. Today, he is a healthy boy living in a faith filled family that continues to place their trust in God.

When asked why miracles don’t always happen, Bonnie responded: “That is the hardest part of all of this, and it’s something (my husband) and I talk about a lot because it causes us a lot of sorrow... I don’t know why. I lost a baby in a miscarriage several years ago, and when I found out I was miscarrying I begged God to save my baby, and he didn’t... I don’t know why God allows some suffering and why God answers prayers the way he answers them. But I have to trust and believe that everything works out for the good of those who love him.”ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ americamagazine.org/faith/2019/07/08/miracle-moved-archbishop-fulton-sheen-beatification

ⁱⁱ respectlife.org/2020 based on *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II

ⁱⁱⁱ americamagazine.org/faith/2019/07/28/she-prayed-fulton-sheen-and-her-baby-was-saved-meet-bonnie-engstrom