

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2013

Matthew 9: 1-8

*Which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?*

Here Jesus receives the paralyzed man, a man separated from all that life has to offer, a man Jesus addresses as “son”, a living, if broken, reflection of the Divine Image.

Yet the one sick of the palsy did not get there on his own. He couldn't. Some friends, some relatives maybe, brought him. We don't know who they were as they are only referred to in Scripture as “They”. But it was “their faith” that Jesus saw to which he replied, “Be of good heart, son. Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

This gives us great courage and hope, that we of faith can be instruments for our loved ones and neighbors to encounter the healing love of Christ. While faith may be intensely personal, it is never individual. We work together, we play together, we pray together, we suffer together and we are raised to new life together.

The forgiveness that Jesus offered the one of the palsy is the same forgiveness that he offers all of us, to all of the world. It is the message of salvation. This is the message that Pope Francis in his recent interview called for all preachers to proclaim first and foremost: the proclamation of salvation.<sup>i</sup>

Like the myopia of the scribes' legalism clouding their vision of Jesus, our personal guilt often causes us to feel unworthy. It gives us pause to trust in Jesus' promise of salvation. Jesus knows our minds as well as the scribes', and so gives us the example of curing the one with palsy to assure us of the healing of our souls.

As St. John Chrysostom stated:

*He does the lesser miracle which is the more evident, to be a proof of the greater miracle which is imperceptible. (Catena Aurea: Mt 9:1-8)*

Can we believe it? Can we trust it? Can we trust him?

A story shared with me by another preacher spoke about a man who used to sneak into 8:00 AM Mass. Since his divorce, he was afraid to go to Mass, yet afraid not to go to Mass. He was ashamed of his failure at matrimony. He chose to come in quietly and sit in the back row, next to the aisle so he could come and go quietly and unseen. One Sunday, he listened to the priest preach on this very Gospel. The priest spoke about how sins could strangle the very

child of God in us. But one is never completely paralyzed if we could only hear Jesus' voice offering salvation, calling you his child. One might be momentarily paralyzed, but could be called to rise.

At the end of Mass, despite the man's attempt to leave quietly and unobtrusively, the priest turned to him and whispered to him, "You are a child of God." The man tried to contain himself, but he broke out in tears at the release of the burden he carried. He was freed. He got up, and like the one sick with palsy, went to his house.<sup>ii</sup>

I imagine that man going home, in amazement at being made whole. I imagine him glorifying God just like those who witnessed the healing of the paralytic gave glory to God who gave such power to men.

It is that power, through the risen Christ, which is given to the Church today. It is such power as this, given to our priests, that we are able to come to Mass and trust in the healing power of the Sacraments, trust in the true presence of Christ.

When you come to the Lord's table, when you come to his confessional, may you hear, "Be of good heart, my child. Your sins are forgiven. May you be free of what binds you. Arise and go."

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<sup>i</sup> [www.americanmagazine.org/pope-interview](http://www.americanmagazine.org/pope-interview)

<sup>ii</sup> John Shea, *Eating with the Bridegroom*, p.67-68