

7th Sunday- B 2012
Deacon Pat Hall

Isaiah 43:18-19, 21-22, 24B-25; 2 Corinthians 1:18-22; Mark 2:1-12

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021912.cfm>

Imagine being that paralyzed person being lowered through the ceiling. All you can do is look up. You see the faces of your buddies. Their expressions are tight with strain as they lower you. Their faces are caked with mud from the dust of their work mixing with their sweat. While still close to them you hear their grunts as they struggle to keep you from falling. As you get lower you hear the hum of the room. First a solitary voice, remarkably clear despite its gentleness. Then you hear the sounds of the crowd reaching a din. You hear reactions of laughter at the speaker's keen sense of irony. Sometimes you hear the undertones of indignation about what the speaker is saying.

How did you get here in this strangest of situations?

You have been this way for a long time. Paralyzed. You have been dependant on your family. They've loved you, but you think you should feel guilty because you wish you could be taking care of them. Your family heard that there was a miracle-worker in Capernaum. He seems to care for the poor, the disabled and the outcast. Could there be a chance?

The whole village, mostly cousins, second cousins and other relatives, gather to make the trip. They don't know exactly where they are headed, but as they got closer, they started following the gathering crowds. The crowds surround a fisherman's home. That has to be the place. But, it is surrounded by throngs. How are they going to get to the miracle-worker? A couple of your brothers volunteer to force a wedge between the crowd and get you in. A wise aunt counsels differently.

Arguments break out between family members. Some say this was all a fool's errand; that we all should just return home. A couple of cousins come up with a hair-brained idea.

Has anyone ever heard of such a thing before?

Who would fix the roof? A couple of uncles say they've thatched before. People look to the aunt. She nods her head. Your family makes their way around to the back of the house. Your younger cousins are tossed up onto the roof. With ropes, they help your burly cousins and brothers up. They tear away at the roof, some with their knives, some with their bare hands becoming bloody with the effort. Progress was slow at first, but then they started making headway. They think they can do it. They shout out, "Bring him up." Ropes are tied to the four corners of your litter. They

can't pull you up until your dad has checked the soundness of the knots.

Who has ever heard such a thing?

Your family is starting to chant a psalm. People are getting excited. You feel a jolt as your litter is jerked up into the air. You feel yourself being dragged across the roof. You're being patted on the head. You hear, "You'll be all right." They suspend you over the hole. You are swaying back and forth, but they steady you and your descent begins. You feel the heat of dozens of packed bodies. It was loud and then complete silence as first a couple and then all of them notice a litter being lowered on top of them. Some had to scramble to get out of the way. Then there was a jolt as you landed.

The first thing you see is the eyes. The eyes. You've never seen eyes like that before. For the first time in years you forgot about yourself, about your burdens, about your guilt. Already, before you even hear the words, you know it: "Child, your sins are forgiven." Despite you having lived decades, you know that it is true; you are his child. You are whole. You are fulfilled. You hear some commotion, a bit of argument and then you hear, "'I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."

It kind of surprises you. You had forgotten that your village had brought you to be cured. You had forgotten that you were paralyzed. You had forgotten, because your heart had been healed. But now you start to feel a new sensation surging through your limbs. You make a couple of tentative movements, and yes, you can move. You get to your knees. You get up on your feet, you pick up that mat, that symbol of your paralysis, and you stride out through the awestruck silence of the people in the room. Your brothers and cousins looking down through the hole started screaming. As you break out into the sunlight, you hear the cheers of your family. You try to shut them up. All you want to do is tell them about those eyes, that voice, that love. Eventually you will.

Who has ever heard such a thing?

I have. Because, this story happened to me. Not through a thatched roof in Capernaum, but at my house in 2002.

I was flat on my back for two months. The doctors couldn't determine what was wrong with me. In hindsight, their best guess is miralgia paresthetica instigating back spasms conditioned by degenerative disc disease and maybe even the passing of a couple kidney stones. But they just don't know for sure.

What happened was that I was home, languishing on the couch, sometimes only being able to crawl to attend to my needs. I couldn't even read because the flexural prevented my eyes from being able to focus. I was in a semi-conscious condition, the conscious part being full of woe-is-me and why-me. The pastoral team from my old parish invaded my house with an anointing intervention. There was Fr. Ken,

Mrs. Marian and Sr. Sue ready to take me to my Jesus. This was all very embarrassing to me. I was totally self-conscious, but they would hear nothing of it. I surrendered to Jesus in the Anointing of the Sick. I was warmed by their love. And then they left.

But what they left behind was different. Who they left behind was different.

Whenever, I drifted back to the woe-is-me place, I encountered those eyes, that voice and Jesus blocked my downward spiral. My heart, my soul, my mind: I was healed. Sr. Sue in following weeks picked me up to take me to my therapy. My body was recovering even without being sure what was the cause (certainly not without a whole lot of testing that ruled out rather than confirmed the real problem).

I am not cured. I still have miralgia paresthetica and degenerative disc disease. To remain vital, I continue water and physical therapy at the Y 3-5 times a week (my doctor suggests 4-5 times). Because of therapy, I am back playing drop-in soccer with a bunch of other old-timers.

But yet, I am here to tell you about those eyes and that voice. I am here to tell you it wasn't anything I did. I am here to tell you that it was the faith of my friends who got me to the healing power of Jesus.

We are all paralyzed in one way or another. Paralysis is death. Our God is the God of life. God wants to free you from your paralysis. When you come to this altar, to the true presence of Christ, allow Jesus to fill you, to be one with you, to bring you into communion with each other through him.

Hear Jesus say to you, "Rise, pick up the mat of your paralysis and go home."