

Spiritual Paralysis

On this second Sunday of Great Lent, our attention is drawn to parable of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2: 1-12).

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Who could not be moved by the care, sacrifice and determination of the four friends? What love! As a multitude of people squeezed into the house, (who, like Nathaniel, chose to “come and see”), the four friends were not deterred, finding a way to bring the poor paralytic to the feet of our Saviour. Christ saw “their” faith, which, according to a homily by St. Gregory Palamas, included the faith of the paralytic:

...His [the paralytic’s] bearers accepted faith in the Lord and ventured to approach Him as a result of the paralyzed man’s own hopefulness and faith. Persuaded by him, they took him and carried him up on the roof and let him down from there in front of the Lord. They could not have done this against his wishes. Obviously being racked with paralysis had broken down, not his reason, but all barriers and obstacles to faith.

Our all-loving and merciful Lord is constantly inviting us, (through our faith and repentance), to His bosom, to everlasting life. *Thy mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life* (Psalm 22). Like the father of the Prodigal Son, He awaits patiently. Knowing our needs, and seeing our obstacles, He provides the necessary means to overcome those obstacles, sometimes through the merciful infliction of pain and physical suffering. In Psalm 50 we pray: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit*

within me. Such a renewal, a healing, sometimes requires a cauterization of a wound, or bitter, uncomfortable medicine, all through the all-knowing mercy of our Lord.

But if it is deemed by our Lord that such “harsh” measures are not [therapeutically] necessary at this time, we should nevertheless remain cognizant of the fact that sin causes spiritual paralysis. Unrepentant sin weighs us down, blinds our perception, encourages pride-driven self reliance, weakens us spiritually and distances us from God. As each of us sins daily, we are continually impacted and weakened. The complete salvific remedy and cleansing is available at the foot of our Saviour. But first we must be “carried” by a life in the (4) Gospels. The instructive Holy Gospels richly provide us with guidelines for how we should live our lives. The human spirit, led by the Gospels, when embracing the need for struggle, self-correction and spiritual growth, will naturally be drawn to examples. The holy Church provides us with innumerable illustrious examples in the lives of the saints. Therefore, a careful study of the lives of the saints is indispensable for our growth and humbling of spirit, and also draws us to seek their heavenly intercessions. As such a life in the Gospels propels us towards the foot of Christ, we must break through the roof of our pride, and be lowered, prostrating ourselves before our Lord in the same penitent posture of the lowly, repentant Publican.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may we progress during this Lenten season, in our penitent journey to the foot of our Saviour, where we will not only be cleansed and invigorated, but also received as a “son”, by holy adoption and through our Lord’s boundless love and condescension.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.