



6TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW JULY 24

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 9:1-8

[The Paralytic Restored]

At that time, getting into a boat Jesus crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Rise and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" he then said to the paralytic — "Rise, take up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

THE SERMON

Jesus crosses to the northwestern side of the Sea of Galilee, and goes to the area where He grew up, around Capernaum and Nazareth. This is the region of Galilee, and most of His disciples lived there. The inhabitants there were Jewish people who worshiped the God of Israel, had faith and had heard about a prophet and healer named Jesus. Some were still skeptical, but many had witnessed His divine power and glory as He traveled there with His disciples, preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God, and healing the people.



The multitudes gather to hear the Lord's preaching. Some local people want to hear the Lord teach about the Kingdom of God, the love of God, righteousness, forgiveness and eternal life. Some are there for healing. Some are skeptics such as Jewish leaders who reject the Holy Gospel like the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes (that is, scholars of the Jewish law).

However, a small group of people full of faith have decided to bring their loved one before the Son of God's presence because they believe He can help. These are people whose hearts burn with faith in God and believe that the Lord Jesus is a great Prophet of God, full of the Holy Spirit, with the power to heal. They also express their faith and love through their actions by taking their paralyzed friend to Jesus, hoping he may be healed. In this way, they were full of faith, hope and love. When Jesus witnesses their faith, He says to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." Some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, says, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Rise and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." He then said to the paralytic, "Rise, take up your bed and go home."

This is a very bold statement. Everyone present, knowing that the Lord healed many others sicknesses, expected a healing to take place. However, the Lord chose to start with the healing of the soul before the healing of the body. The Lord's declaration that the paralytic's sins are forgiven brings more significant healing, and manifests the eternal work of salvation.

Of course, this is shocking to many because miraculous as it is, it is one thing to witness God healing a person through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the work of the Prophet. We also see this even today in the life of the Church, for there are holy people living amongst us who are known for having gifts, such as clairvoyance or whose prayers for the healing of the sick and suffering are quickly answered by God. This is also true with the Saints, for those of us who pray for their assistance in our healing. However, it is quite another matter altogether for someone to declare that a man's sins are forgiven.

To put it another way, the Lord Jesus spoke in a way only God could speak. Only God can forgive sins. We forgive those who have wronged us because the Lord tells us to do so. Even so, we do not have the right to declare all of someone's sins to be forgiven because only God can do so.

Some immediately begin to doubt. They might wonder who but God alone can forgive sins? The Lord hears their thoughts and knows their hearts before they utter a word. In His love and compassion, however, He uses a miracle to demonstrate His divinity and power. He explains to them, with clear reasoning, that the statement "your sins are forgiven," is easy to utter because there is no visible, physical evidence to support it. However, to say, "Rise, take up your bed, and go home" is a statement that is proven by its effect.

Jesus heals both body and soul with His word alone. He is the Word of God incarnate and the Word who created the heavens and the earth. He is the Word who brings the light of the Kingdom of God to shine in our hearts, recreating us, reshaping us, healing us, giving us purpose, and meaning, and restoring us to eternal life. He has redeemed us by His blood. This happens to us every single day when we choose to be close to God, open ourselves to His presence, grace, and love, and live the sacramental life of the Church. The sacraments of Baptism, repentance and Confession, the Holy Eucharist, Holy Unction are all channels of God's forgiveness and grace. Through them, we enter the Kingdom of God, we reunite with Him.

Our Lord has the power and authority to heal a paralytic, even in front of others, by the power of His word, and so He also has the ability to forgive his sins. If the paralytic gets up, which is visible to all, this is proof that the One who heals by the power of God is the same One who forgives by the power of being the Son of God. In this way, Christ's coming into the world in His incarnation releases humanity from its shackles.

As Saint John Chrysostom says, "Do you see how He indicates Him to be Creator both of souls and bodies? He heals, therefore, the palsy in each of the two substances and makes the invisible evident by that which is in sight." The healing of the souls is an even greater miracle than the healing of the body because it is a healing that lasts for eternity. As the scribes rightly point out, only God has the power to forgive sins. And later, Christ hands this authority to His disciples and their successors, namely, the Bishops and Priests, through the sacraments of the Church). The forgiveness of our sins brings about a reconciliation between us and God, and this reconciliation is the restoration of our life, and our eternal purpose. We are created to be in communion with God, not apart. And when our communion is broken because of our choices, God, in His limitless love, provides restoration through forgiveness and reconciliation.

True repentance is central to our spiritual life with Christ. We all require repentance because no one is sinless, except Jesus. The spiritual life begins with repentance until our very last breath. Our good and loving God created Adam and Eve in His image and likeness. We are created in God's image by His choice, and we can be like Him by our choices. Becoming like God means becoming sanctified by God, and ultimately, becoming one with Him.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were able to effortlessly converse with God. They were spotless, pure and meek before God. It is this state of purity that we strive to return to through a life of repentance and forgiveness. Forgiveness of sins is the very salvation which our Savior Jesus Christ offers us. Repentance is a second baptism after our first one, grace upon grace.

We are called not simply to be believers of Christ, but to become His disciples. A Christian, a follower of Christ, recognizes that no sin is greater than the love of God. Regardless of how extraordinary we perceive our sin to be, God is eager to forgive us

if we, in turn, are simply willing to try to repent. God does not expect us to never sin, God simply hopes that we try to get back up. And getting up again after we have fallen in the spiritual life is how we participate in the Lord's Resurrection here and now.

What is needed is for us to have faith, hope and love. The paralytic is forgiven and receives salvation, as well as his friends who helped him because of their faith. We read that "when Jesus saw their faith" , He healed the paralytic. We come to Christ in faith and hope because we love Him and our neighbor. When we help our neighbor, we are also helped by God. Let us continually come to Him, knowing that His love forgives and restores us. He heals the paralysis of our bodies, hearts and souls. When He does so, we get up from our beds and begin our journey home, that is, to our eternal destiny with God in His Kingdom.

Follow us    @goarchDRE

Subscribe & read other sermons at: religioused.goarch.org