



SUNDAY OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

March 31

THE GOSPEL READING

Mark 2:1-12

[Sins Are Forgiven: A Paralytic]

At that time, Jesus entered Capernaum and it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is a blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home."

And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"



GREEK ORTHODOX
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THE SERMON

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ gathered His disciples and began traveling throughout the Galilee region, proclaiming the Kingdom of God. They went to a house in Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Many people from the entire region came to see and hear Him.

On this occasion, so many people gathered to hear Jesus that no one could get close to the door. Meanwhile, there was a man with paralysis who heard that Jesus was in Capernaum, asked his friends to carry him to the house. When they get there, they realize there is no way to enter. This is when they find a solution to their seemingly impossible challenge. They got onto the roof of the house, removed the top coverings, and let down the pallet on which the man lay. In this way, he was put right in front of the Lord. We read that Jesus marvels at “their” faith, meaning not only the paralytic’s faith but also his friends’ faith as well. The Lord then addresses the paralytic and says to him, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

This is a surprising statement for a few reasons. First, the paralytic and everyone else expected Jesus to heal him physically. But Jesus starts by forgiving his sins *before* healing him physically. He could then restart his life without the heavy burden of sin constantly dragging him down.

The statement also appears unexpected because the Lord does what only God could do, that is, to forgive sins. Some scribes started questioning the Lord in their hearts. “It is blasphemy!” they were thinking, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

The Lord knows what is in their hearts and hears their thoughts without them even uttering a word. They cannot understand who Jesus is and what He came into the world to do. The Lord proceeds to heal the paralytic physically by asking him to take up his bed and go home, which he does. This symbolizes our healing by which the Lord gives us the ability to get up from our spiritual infirmities and walk “home,” that is, on the way to eternal life.

Jesus Christ heals the paralytic physically so that they “may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” As the paralytic gets up, he does so by the same power and authority of the One true God who previously declared that his sins are forgiven. Only God can do this, and physical healing testifies to spiritual healing for the benefit of the unbelievers.

Christ came into the world to forgive sins and to free humanity from its bondage. It is sin that drags all of us down and prevents us from seeing clearly. It prevents us from achieving our true potential. *Spiritual healing* is more important than physical healing. And as the scribes correctly note, God alone can forgive sins. Christ later confers this authority to the Apostles and the Church through apostolic succession. As the paralytic was healed, they were all astonished and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

The people's response to the healing of the paralytic can be used to model our own response as we glorify God before the world. Saint Gregory Palamas says, "Let us stir up all who see us to glorify God as they recognize that this house has Christ within it, Who gives strength to those whose souls are paralyzed . . . in this way they will go into the house that is really ours."

Faith is indispensable for salvation. The Lord has become Incarnate and has united human and divine nature. When we are mystically united to Him through Holy Baptism and the other Sacraments, we become recipients of His grace and healing. However, this cannot happen without faith. It is through faith that we trust in Him. And as we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we walk by faith, not by sight. We know that we have been saved by grace through faith, not by our own effort, but as a gift from God.

The question that naturally arises from this Gospel lesson is, what prompts Jesus to heal the paralytic? What does the Gospel say exactly? The Gospel says that Jesus saw "their" faith. Whose faith did He see? It does not say Jesus saw *his* faith, meaning only the paralytic's faith. It says that He saw *their* faith. Jesus saw the faith of the people, the faith of the paralytic, and the faith of the paralytic's friends. The plural is extremely important because it introduces us to an aspect of our faith that cannot be emphasized enough: that our faith is expressed and lived out in the community with others, and not only individually, because we are *all* connected to God and *each other*.

As we see in this passage, the friends of the paralytic joined him in faith and took him to see the Lord. As a community, as the Body of Christ, we believe together, we worship together, we join ourselves to Christ together, and we serve one another. And, as we pray in the Divine Liturgy, we "commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God."

Living in Christ requires a strong personal effort, but Christians live and pray in communities together with others. The most important gathering in the Church — the Divine Liturgy — takes place within the community. Our prayers, and the common chalice, from which we receive Holy Communion, reinforce this community perspective. God Himself was revealed in Trinity, in One and Three. There is in God this powerful dimension of diversity and community. And throughout the Liturgy and our prayers, we constantly refer to God in this way: as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Lord heals by the power of His Word. He is the Word of God incarnate. The same Word of God spoke when He created all things is the Word He speaks to us as He leads us closer to His likeness. He calls us by name, forgiving our sins when we hear His voice and follow Him.

Faith is the link between God's Word and our physical and spiritual healing. Let us trust in the Lord, not sparing any effort to get to know Him, to allow Him to enter our lives, with the confidence that He loves us and that all things are possible with God.