



SUNDAY OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

March 20

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!"

THE SERMON

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ gathers His disciples and begins to



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travel throughout the region of Galilee proclaiming the Kingdom of God. There was a house where He and His disciples were gathering in the city of 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, there were so many people gathered that no one could get close to the door. The Lord was preaching to the people, and all wanted to hear Him. Meanwhile, there was a paralytic who had heard that Jesus was in Capernaum, and he asks his friends to carry him to the house. When they get there, they realize that there was no way to enter. However, this is when they find a solution to their seemingly impossible challenge. They manage to get themselves to the house's roof, remove the top coverings, and let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. In this way, he is put right in front of the Lord. We read that Jesus marvels at "their" faith, meaning not only the paralytic's faith but 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. The first is that the paralytic and everyone else expected Jesus to heal him physically. But Jesus starts by forgiving his sins before healing him physically. The paralytic is healed spiritually. He is free to restart his life without the heavy burden of sin constantly dragging him down. The statement also appears unexpected because the Lord proclaims that the paralytic's sins are forgiven. In other words, Jesus purports to do what only God could do. This was provocative because at that time, the precise nature of Christ and His Mission were not perfectly understood even by those closest to Him.

The Lord teaches us to forgive one another. Yet, in order to be truly reconciled to God and to one another, we seek forgiveness from God which only God can and does provide in His infinite Mercy and Love for humankind. In forgiving the sins of the Paralytic, Jesus reveals His love and His true nature as a loving God.

The Gospel relates how some scribes start to question all of this in their hearts. "It is a blasphemy!" they are 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. These people cannot understand who Jesus is and what He really 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 the paralytic does.

Jesus Christ heals the paralytic physically that they "may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins." As the paralytic gets up, which is something visible to all, 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 the physical therapy testifies to the spiritual therapy for the benefit of the unbelievers.

Christ came into the world to forgive sins, in order 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 (John 20:23; Mathew 16:19) and the Church through apostolic succession. As the paralytic is 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. As 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, by which I mean the country in and above the heavens, where Christ now is, the Heir and Bestower of our inheritance."

Faith is indispensable for salvation. The Lord has become Incarnate, and He has united human and divine nature. When we are mystically united to Him through Baptism and the Sacraments, we become recipients of His grace and healing. However, this cannot happen without faith. It is through faith that we trust in Him. Like the healing of the paralytic, faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen . . . without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:1-6). As we believe and trust in the Lord Jesus as our God and Savior, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7) knowing that "by grace [we] have been saved through faith, and that not of [ourselves]; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

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 that Jesus saw *his* faith, meaning only the paralytic's faith. It says that He saw *their* faith? So, whose faith did Jesus see? Jesus saw the faith of *the people*, the faith of the paralytic, *and* the faith of the paralytic's friends. How important is the plural here? 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 community with others, and not only individually, because we are all connected to God and to 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, this is true, but Christians live and pray in communities, together with others. The most important sacrament in the Church, the Divine Liturgy, takes place within the community. Our prayers, the common chalice which we are called to drink from, reinforce this perspective of community. 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 Jesus heals by the power of His Word. He is the Word of God incarnate (John 1:1-14), and the same Word the Lord Jesus 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, and He forgives our sins when we hear His voice and follow Him. Faith is the link, it is the connection between the Lord's Word and our healing, both physical and spiritual. 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 with God, all things are possible. Let us take advantage of all the opportunities offered during Great Lent to reconnect to our parish, rekindle our connection with our local Orthodox Christian community, and revive our sacramental life in Christ.

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