

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Given that Mark's Gospel was the first one in the New Testament to be written, today's extract could be the earliest evidence we have of intercessory prayer, or better still, intercessory action. The crowd around Jesus is so packed, that the friends of the man with paralysis get creative and, literally, go in over the top. There is no sense in today's Gospel of "we shouldn't" or, "we can't." There is only boldness in presenting the man before Jesus. Imagine if his friends didn't do this, he might never have known Jesus' healing touch.

There have been moments when we have all felt desperate. Sometimes when we are ill in mind, body, or spirit, or worse still, when someone we love is in a similar state, we can have bloodied hands from banging on the doors of heaven, asking for God to do a miracle.

In today's Gospel Jesus heals the man dramatically presented before him by his friends. While the physical restitution was the most obvious, it would not have been the only part of the man Jesus healed that day. We can imagine the memories and other afflictions that would have accompanied the man's paralysis. There would have been emotional and spiritual restoration as well.

Whatever of the matter of the request we place before Christ, today's story informs us about Jesus' attitude toward our suffering. Jesus initially tells the man "Go, your sins are forgiven." Later he says, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk." In first century Palestine, both statements were almost identical. To us, these statements are vastly different. In Jesus' time all illness was a curse from God because of sin. Jesus counters this belief by saying that no illness is from God, no suffering is sent to us because of sin.

How many of us need to hear this? After years of thinking our own paralysis has come about because God is punishing us, this Sunday we hear the Lord say, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk." This does not necessarily mean our problems will not need attention in the future. This side of death we are always unfinished creations, God's "work in progress." But we are reminded that it is always Christ's desire to make us well and whole on every level where we need healing and peace. We also see the power of friends who support and pray for us and lay our needs before God. What an act of unselfish love intercessory prayers and actions really are.

In this Eucharist may we leave behind the Christian heresy that holds that God uses spiritual, mental, or physical pain to get even with us. In its place may we hold onto the image that whatever our paralysis might be, whatever our mat might look like, with the support of selfless friends we can rise up this Sunday and walk into freedom and new life.

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