

As the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy continues the Church will invite all of us to partake of the Lord's mercy particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This year reminds us of the centrality of mercy in Christianity because our Lord came precisely to end the reign of sin in the world and to save us, individually, from our sins. The Servant of God Archbishop Fulton Sheen would frequently stress in his talks that, "unlike all the great figures of history, our Lord came to this earth **in order to die.**" In this way He gained for us the forgiveness of our sins. And when the priest raises his hands in the

Sacrament of Reconciliation and pronounces the words of absolution, the very blood that Christ shed on the cross at Calvary pours upon the head of the penitent. How can this be, you might ask. After all Christ is in Heaven in His glorified body (and not on earth) and Scripture says that He dies but once. So how can He shed His Blood again for the forgiveness of sins now? As Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Son of God His actions are not bound by time and space as yours and mine are. His saving actions have continuous effect. Notice that He gave His Apostles the power to forgive sins (cf. John 20: 19-23) **after** His death and resurrection. He didn't say that as a result of His Death on the cross and His resurrection, all those who would make an act of faith in Him would automatically (as a result of His death on the cross) be "justified" and have all their



Christ Heals the Paralytic
— Bernhard Rode (1780)

“RISE, TAKE UP YOUR PALLET.”

sins (including those committed in the future) automatically swept under the heavenly carpet. He still empowered His Apostles to forgive sins in His name. By hearing the words of absolution, you can know with certainty that your sins are totally forgiven and not just swept under some blanket.

To help us enter into this mystery of reconciliation we will look at the story of the healing of the paralytic as recounted in the Gospel according to Mark chapter 2: 1-13. It's important to recall that whenever we encounter a miracle story in the Gospels, they not only recount a physical event (here a paralyzed man be-

ing healed), but also an important spiritual truth is being manifested: the forgiveness of sins. A paralytic is brought to Jesus while He was "preaching the word to them." Because of the crowd the men carrying the paralytic could not get to Jesus so they make a hole in the roof to lower him down. "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven.'"

First we note his condition: the man is paralyzed and therefore helpless, dependent on the generosity of the men who carried him. At that time people would normally think that the paralytic was a sinner, and thus being punished by God or that maybe his parents or someone further back sinned and he was reaping the consequences of that sin. Recall the story of the man born blind in the Gospel according to John when the Apostles ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who

sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.'"

The paralytic reminds us first of all that sin itself is paralysis, both for us individually and as a culture. This account reminds us that we are born into Original Sin, as a result of the sin of our first parents, and we do not have the ability on our own, of our own resources to get to God. **We can't save ourselves.** This truth is alluded to by the fact that the paralytic is carried to Jesus by four men. We need God's grace and forgiveness and we need Jesus to give us that grace and forgiveness. We currently labor under a paralysis which says that every problem has a material cause and therefore a material solution i.e., wealth redistribution, structural changes, more government control ultimately leading to a world government. Let's recall the words of Dr. Maria-Anca Cernea (president of the Association of Catholic Doctors of Romania) given at the recent Synod of the Family and has appeared in previous newsletters. *"The Church's mission is to save souls. Evil, in this world comes from sin. Not from income disparity or 'climate change.' The solution is: Evangelization. Conversion. Not an ever-increasing government control. Not a world government."* These words should be emblazoned on church banners (take down the "Bloom where you're planted" stuff), billboards and bumper-stickers. Recently the *New York Daily News* featured a blasphemous headline mocking prayer by saying **"This isn't going to help!"** The Daily News could be told that maybe if a lot more people were praying and striving to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, then



*"Speak to the world about My mercy...
It is a sign for the end times."*

— Our Lord to St. Faustina

maybe there wouldn't be this culture of violence or poverty for starters (the biggest single cause of poverty is not income disparity but the breakdown of the family).

When we chose to sin, we bring paralysis upon ourselves. Many times the Church is accused of "excluding people" because of her fidelity to our Lord's teachings. This theme reverberated at the recent synod where the Church was accused of excluding people from "full participation" (receiving Holy Communion) who were divorced and remarried without a church annulment, cohabiting or in a so-called same-sex "union."

So, as in these cases, when we deliberately do something that Christ clearly commands is not to be done (the essence of sin), we in effect bring paralysis upon ourselves. By sin we exclude ourselves from the membership. A very false notion of mercy made the rounds at the synod whereby "mercy" meant that anyone in any of the above mentioned situations would be "regularized" without them having to make any changes in their lifestyle. When we see our Lord forgiving people of their sins He never affirms their current situation. In the story of the woman caught in adultery, our Lord doesn't say to her, "No problem, everything is all-right." He says to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and **sin no more.**" St. Mary Magdalene experienced the mercy of our Lord and did not return to her sinful occupation. She made a big change in her life and would be rewarded by being the first person (outside of the Blessed Mother) to see the risen Christ. To experience true mercy and thus be cured of our spiritual paralysis, we must make the changes to our lifestyle that conversion

demand. Some of these changes might be painful, but they remind us that there is no Christian life without the cross.

The four men carrying the paralytic to Christ also reminds us of our responsibility in the reconciliation process. We are to bring people suffering from the paralysis of sin to Christ the Divine Physician. Notice that to bring the paralytic to Christ, they have to tear a hole in the roof of the house. Tradition has it that this house belonged to Simon Peter. What were his thoughts as he saw his property being wrecked. The gospel is silent on that. Nonetheless this demonstrates that we will have to be persistent sometimes in coming to Christ ourselves or in bringing others to him.

The changes we might have to make in our lifestyles might call for persistence and patience on our part. Few get the gift to make the switch from sinner to saint in an instance as St. Paul did. For most of us it will be a case of one step forward and two steps backwards for a while. Our Lord is very patient. He knows that we, unlike the angels, are made of flesh and spirit and as St. Paul tells us, the “flesh wars against the spirit.” Christ also tells us that it’s not the one whose one-hundred percent successful that will inherit the kingdom, but the one who is persistent. We have to be absolutely convinced of our need for Christ and that He alone can heal us of the paralysis of our sins. We have to

go to Him in the same manner as the Canaanite woman (cf. Matthew 15: 21-28).

We have to be just as patient and persistent in bringing others to Christ. All of us have family members or friends who are living apart from Christ. Prayer, sacrifice, penance and above all, holiness of life will go a long way. In this we are often planting seeds. The seed will bear fruit long after we’re gone but we will have done an essential part. So love them and be faithful to Christ in all charity.

A final thought. In the February issue of *Inside the Vatican* magazine an article appeared entitled “The Jubilee of Mercy: A Final Gift of Time to Repent Before it Is Too Late?” Our Lord is very patient with sinners, but eventually the day must come when He will judge us. He revealed to Saint Faustina the following: *“Speak to the world about My mercy... It is a sign for the end times. After it will come the Day of Justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fountain of My mercy. I am prolonging the time of mercy for the sake of sinners. But woe to them if they do not recognize this time of My visitation. He who refuses to pass through the door of My mercy must pass through the door of My Justice.”*

May we avail ourselves of this great gift.✠