

7th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)
February 19, 2012 – Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

You burdened me with your sins,
and wearied me with your crimes.
It is I, I, who wipe out,
for my own sake, your offenses;
your sins I remember no more.

Last Sunday we saw Jesus heal a leper – leprosy, a disease whose symptoms everyone could see. The healing of the leper was a metaphor, a symbolic representation of the forgiveness of sin. It was a real, physical disease, of course, caused by the *Yersinia Pestis* bacteria, – if it really was leprosy, that is. But it symbolized healing souls from the disease of sin.

For some reason, today's Gospel about the paralytic is a reading that I remember vividly from my childhood at St. Therese Church in the 1950s. I don't know why it stands out so clearly when I don't have any recollection of any other particular Gospel reading from that era. But for some reason, it seems like we heard this reading every few weeks back then. Maybe I was just struck by the image of someone being lowered through a hole in the roof.

Now, we did hear plenty about sin back in those days. Old Monsignor Whitfield was kind of a fire-and-brimstone type . . . when he wasn't talking about money, that is. But I don't remember hearing anything about what this Gospel is really about.

In today's Gospel, the curing of the physical infirmity is clearly an image of liberation from sin. Although the paralytic is cured, it is liberation from sin itself that is the

explicit and central focus of the Readings. We've seen Jesus heal other illnesses, cast out demons – but today, for the first time in Mark's Gospel, Jesus makes a specific point of His power to forgive sins:

see, I am doing something new!
your sins I remember no more.

This is something new! Those who saw it glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

The physical paralysis is real physical ailment – but it's also a stand-in for sin. Jesus shows us that the real evil we should be concerned about is not the physical infirmity, but the spiritual paralysis of sin. That's what lays us low, leaves us flat on our faces and incapable of taking a step towards God by ourselves.

In criminology, there's something called the "broken windows theory." It's about what they call the signaling effect of urban disorder and vandalism on more crime and neighborhood deterioration anti-social behavior. According to the theory, monitoring and maintaining urban environments in a well-ordered condition – fixing broken windows before they become something worse – may stop further vandalism as well as escalation of minor anti-social behavior into more serious crime. If we systematically deal with lesser offenses, would-be perpetrators may get the idea that even minor crime will not be tolerated, and they'd better walk the straight and narrow. At least that's the theory.

In a way, the idea of the "broken windows theory" also applies to sin. If we become insensitive to our lesser sins, it makes it easier for us to commit more serious sins.

Sin tends to reproduce and propagate and reinforce itself. It can become a habit, a pattern that's difficult to break out of.

Only God can forgive sins. Jesus forgives sins today because He is God. He can forgive sin – and make a paralytic walk – because He is God himself.

That's why, in the Gospel, the scribes were asking themselves, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?" They were right about the part about of God alone being able to forgive sins. But they didn't understand who Jesus was. They're only the first in a long line of people who have been unable to accept the idea of the Incarnation of the Son of God. There are a lot of them around today. There are a lot of people for whom history began when the sun came up this morning. They just don't get it.

God still works through the humanity of Jesus, present in his body, which is the Church.

The authority of Jesus on earth to forgive sins is an essential part of the "something new" that God is doing. The power to forgive sins is now "on earth", no longer a hidden power exercised by God in the heavens. It is a power that belongs to "the Son of Man," this man Jesus, who shows the reality of his authority by the miraculous cure of the paralytic, and so many others. And the insight into all this is given to men, to us, for whom all this is done.

Father Matthew Kelty, up at the Trappist monastery in Kentucky, wrote a book called "My Song is of Mercy." That's the essence of revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that "By Christ's will, the Church possesses the power to forgive

the sins of the baptized and exercises it through bishops and priests normally in the sacrament of Penance."

That's too much to talk about today. Read all about it in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

In John's first letter, he says that "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" In today's Psalm, we all said "Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you." Only by saying that can we hear "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace"

It's possible, by the grace of God, to avoid serious sin. But just as broken windows make us numb to more serious urban blight, even our everyday failings diminish love and move us in the direction of the paralyzing effect of sin. That's why most Sundays in the penitential rite, I ask all of us to call to mind the times that we've fallen short of the love of God.

And when I say that, I'm not just asking you to do it. I'm reminding myself to do it as well. I've often said that when I preach, I'm preaching more to myself than to anyone else. I try to say what y'all need to hear, but it's also what I need to hear myself.

Notice that it's the faith of the paralytic's friends that bring him to Jesus, and moves Jesus to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus saw *their* faith. *They* believed that Jesus could heal their friend, and fully expected him to do so. And the paralytic also must have had the same strong faith or he would not have allowed them to do what they did.

That's why we are here today. Our Church prays every day for the forgiveness of sinners – that prayer will bring us to God when we ourselves can't do it on our own.

This is just one of the many proofs of the divinity of Jesus which he gave during his public ministry. In fact, that was the principal charge on which they had him crucified.

You burdened me with your sins,
and wearied me with your crimes.
It is I, I, who wipe out,
for my own sake, your offenses;
your sins I remember no more.

Readings

Reading 1 Is 43:18-19, 21-22, 24b-25

Thus says the LORD:
Remember not the events of the past,
the things of long ago consider not;
see, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
In the desert I make a way,
in the wasteland, rivers.
The people I formed for myself,
that they might announce my praise.
Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob,
for you grew weary of me, O Israel.
You burdened me with your sins,
and wearied me with your crimes.
It is I, I, who wipe out,
for my own sake, your offenses;
your sins I remember no more.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 41:2-3, 4-5, 13-14

R. (5b) **Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.**
Blessed is the one who has regard for the lowly and the poor;
in the day of misfortune the LORD will deliver him.
The LORD will keep and preserve him;
and make him blessed on earth,
and not give him over to the will of his enemies.
R. **Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.**
The LORD will help him on his sickbed,
he will take away all his ailment when he is ill.
Once I said, "O LORD, have pity on me;
heal me, though I have sinned against you."
R. **Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.**
But because of my integrity you sustain me
and let me stand before you forever.
Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from all eternity. Amen. Amen.
R. **Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.**

Reading 2 2 Cor 1:18-22

Brothers and sisters:
As God is faithful,
our word to you is not "yes" and "no."
For the Son of God, Jesus Christ,
who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me,
was not "yes" and "no," but "yes" has been in him.
For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him;
therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory.
But the one who gives us security with you in Christ
and who anointed us is God;
he has also put his seal upon us
and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

Gospel Mk 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days,
it became known that he was at home.
Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them,
not even around the door,
and he preached the word to them.
They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.
Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd,
they opened up the roof above him.
After they had broken through,
they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying.
When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,
"Child, your sins are forgiven."
Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves,
"Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming.
Who but God alone can forgive sins?"
Jesus immediately knew in his mind
what they were thinking to themselves,
so he said, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?
Which is easier, to say to the paralytic,
'Your sins are forgiven,'
or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk?'
But that you may know
that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth"
-he said to the paralytic,
"I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."
He rose, picked up his mat at once,
and went away in the sight of everyone.
They were all astounded
and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."