

Second Sunday in Lent - On the Paralysed Man in Capernaum

While the Lord was teaching and everyone, or nearly everyone, was standing and taking in the gracious words which came from His mouth, "Certain men come", it says, "unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where the Lord was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay" (Mark 2:3-4). You might think that the faith of those doing the carrying accomplished everything, and that the Lord went on to heal the paralysed man because He was satisfied with their faith (cf. Mark 2:5). It seems to me, however, that the reality is different. It is true that when the Lord healed the servant of the Centurion, He did not look for the faith on the part of the servant. Nor did He look for faith either from the Canaanite woman's daughter or from Jairus' daughter, because He was satisfied with the faith of those who approached Him on their behalf. Of these three, however, Jairus' daughter had died, the Canaanite woman's daughter was beside herself, and the servant was not even present. The paralysed man, by contrast, was present and in his right mind, although his body was paralysed. It seems more likely to me, therefore, that his bearers accepted faith in the Lord and ventured to approach Him as a result of the paralysed man's own hopefulness and faith. Persuaded by him, they took him and carried him up on the roof and let him down from there in front of the Lord. They could not have done this against his wishes. Obviously being racked with paralysis had broken down, not his reason, but all barriers and obstacles to faith.

There are times when illness is better for sinners than good health, because it helps them towards salvation and blunts their inborn evil impulses. Inasmuch as it repays the debt of sins by means of suffering, it makes them able to receive healing of their souls in the first instance, then healing of their bodies. This happens most of all when the sick person, understanding that the affliction is a remedy from God, bears it courageously, falls down before God with faith and asks for forgiveness, through whatever works he can manage. This was shown by the paralysed man who did what he could, and proved by the Lord's own words and actions. The Pharisees, however, were incapable of comprehending, and blasphemed and murmured among themselves (Mark 2:6-7). "When Jesus saw their faith", the faith, that is of the bed-ridden man who had been lowered, and those who had let him down from the roof, "He said unto the sick of the palsy, son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark 2:5).

What a blessed way to be addressed! He hears himself call "son" and is adopted as the child of the heavenly Father. He is joined to God who is without sin, having immediately become sinless himself through the forgiveness of his sins. In order that his body can subsequently be renewed, his soul first receives deliverance from sin from the Lord, who knows that in the beginning when the soul fell into the snares of sin, physical illness and death followed, in accordance with His righteous judgement.

... Let us then brethren, glorify Him now by our actions, regarding this miracle anagogically as a pattern for virtue. Anyone addicted to sensual pleasures is paralysed in his soul, and is lying sick on the bed of voluptuousness with its deceptive bodily ease. Once, however, he has been won over by the exhortations in the Gospel, he confesses his sins and triumphs over them and the paralysis they have brought upon his soul. He is taken up and brought to the Lord by these four: self-condemnation, confession of former sins, promising to renounce evil ways from now on, and prayer to God. They cannot, however bring him near to God without uncovering the roof, scattering the tiles, earth and other building material. Our roof is the reasoning part of the soul, which is set above everything else within us. But it has lying on top of it, like a large quantity of building material, its connection with the passions

and earthly matters. Once this connection has been loosed and shaken off by means of the four things we have mentioned, then we can rally be let down, that is, humbled, fall down before the Lord, draw near to Him and ask and receive His healing.

After being healed, our mind has our body under control and leads and carries it about. Through it our mind brings to light the fruits and works of repentance, so that all who see them glorify God. ... 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 paralysed and commands them to lift up and offer up to Him, with a spiritual understanding pleasing to God, their physical senses and perceptions, instead of being mindlessly carried away and brought down by them. 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.

To whom belong glory, might, honour and worship, with His Father without beginning and the holy, good and life-giving spirit, now and for ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.