

SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST ~ OF ST. GREGORY PALAMAS
RAISING OF THE PARALYTIC
Mark 2:1-12, March 20, 2022

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church, Watervliet, NY

Continuing with the original spiritual themes of the Sundays of Great Lent, last Sunday's lesson of the necessity for desire, effort and repentance in order to experience the manifestation of the Kingdom is exemplified in today's Gospel with the story of the paralytic.

Our Savior had returned home to Capernaum, and a large crowd gathered in and around the house. There was a certain paralytic who wanted to be healed. The first prerequisite in order to receive healing was whether or not he *believed* that Jesus could heal him. This obstacle was readily overcome, because he had firm and strong faith in our Savior Jesus Christ. The second requirement was the paralytic's need for help. This too was readily overcome when four devoted friends carried the paralytic on his pallet and brought him to the Lord. Arriving at the house of Jesus, they were faced with another obstacle. Because of the throngs of the crowd, they could not approach the Lord. When we have a firm faith and devotion to the Lord and seek to approach Him, there is no obstacle too big or so great that cannot be overcome through *effort* so that we may approach our heart's desire, our beloved Savior Jesus Christ. There are many people who make little or no effort. For them Jesus Christ and the Church is boring and a nuisance. For them it is some kind of obligation and they think that going to Confession and to church once a year in order to receive Holy Communion in some kind of perfunctory and legalistic way they have fulfilled their "obligation" and now they are saved. They will not make an appearance in church again for another year. These people are sadly mistaken.

In the time of Jesus homes had a flat thatched roof. The paralytic was carried on his pallet to the rooftop. A hole was made in the thatch, and he was lowered down into the house amidst the crowd and at the feet of Jesus. Seeing his faith and devotion, Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven. Sin and illness are closely related. The Church is a spiritual hospital. We are all spiritually ill. Therefore, we all go to the Church and through the Holy Mysteries and grace of God we receive healing. However, our healing is contingent upon the necessity to believe, to have faith, and to make an effort. Even faith as small as mustard seed can move mountains, our Savior tells us. But we must have faith. And if we lack faith, or if our faith is weak, then we should pray to the Lord to help us so that our faith would increase and become stronger.

So why does the Lord first forgive the paralytic his sins before He heals him of his paralysis? We all suffer in various ways from spiritual paralysis, the disease of the soul. Christian methodology works this way: first the soul must be healed. First we must sincerely repent of our sins and seek forgiveness. We should first receive the medicines of the Church ~ the Body and Blood of our Savior and Holy Unction. Having attended to the spirit, the soul, now we can attend to the body and avail ourselves of the medicines and methods of the physicians of the body, having first called the doctors of the soul ~ the priest.

The Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They say that only God can forgive sins. The Pharisees are correct when they say this. Jesus demonstrates to them, however, by healing the man's physical paralysis, which everyone can see with their physical eyes, that He also has the power and authority to heal the man's spiritual paralysis, which is invisible to the naked eye. This Gospel concludes with the words that "they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'" (Mark 2:12).

Jesus tells the Apostles that to them is given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever they bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever they loose on earth, will be loosed in Heaven (Matt. 16:19). Does this mean that the priest, in the Mystery (Sacrament) of Confession, has the same power and authority as Jesus to forgive sins? Not exactly. Jesus

always says that He is doing the work of the Father and always lifts His eyes to Heaven before performing a mighty deed. Yet Jesus also says “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). We know that the Son and the Father, as well as the Spirit, are each separate Persons, or *hypostases*, to use the language of theology, yet the Mystery of the Holy Trinity is that there is only one God, three separate persons, yet they are one. They are not co-mingled in any way. The priest receives special gifts, charismas and authority through the Holy Spirit at the time of ordination. When the priest reads the prayer of absolution at the conclusion of the confession, he does not forgive the penitent himself, but asks the Lord to forgive the penitent all of his sins. The priest and Jesus are not one like Jesus is one with the Father. The priest is a man, a creation of God, and Jesus is the Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. But the priest is endowed with graces and charismas that are unique to the priesthood alone.

May we all exhibit a firm faith and a sincere effort as we continue our journey during Great Lent towards the Bright and Mystical Pascha of the Lord! Amen.

