

**RAISING OF THE PARALYTIC**  
**Mark 2:1-12**

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In one week we will have reached the midpoint of Great Lent. We have heard many prayers of repentance in church. The Prayer of St. Ephraim is read throughout the week. The beautiful penitential and mystical Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, served in the evening with the lights low in the church, helps us to see our sins and feel compunction for our moral shortcomings. And what can I say about the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete? Almost every word is like a sword plunged into our hearts, because every imaginable sin is starkly mentioned without mincing words, and we are guilty of all of them in one way or another.

When we see our sins more clearly, and especially when we are confronted by them, we are at a critical juncture in our lives. St. John of the Ladder reminds us that it is no surprise that we keep falling from the same sins. The tragedy, however, is if we become complacent in our sins and give up the struggle to fight against them. The devil will send us thoughts such as, "God is merciful," or "All I have to do is believe in God and I don't have to do anything else." The devil wants us to sit back and say to ourselves, "Oh well, I can't beat this, so I will just live this way, and God will understand." This is a delusion of the worst kind, when we no longer feel guilt for our sins and accept sin as an ordinary part of our lives. Sin is spiritual illness, sin is not normal, it is abnormal, and sin leads to physical illness and suffering. Does it really make sense to you to just accept this and not struggle against it?

Today a paralytic is brought to our Savior. The Lord tells him, "Your sins are forgiven you." And only then does He tell the man to "take up your pallet and walk." There is another place in the Gospel when, after healing a man, the Lord says, "Go and sin no more, lest something worse happen to you." We are at a crossroad at this point in Lent. Every crossroad has a signpost, and the two signs in front of us point in two different directions, each one to a very different and opposite path. One arrow points to the spiritual path. The other arrow points to the worldly path. When confronted with our sins, we face a choice: we can either be conformed or we can be transformed. When we choose to struggle with our sins, even if we fall again and again, we are still making progress, whether we see it or not. We are on the spiritual path and we are undergoing transformation. When we cease to struggle, when we accept and allow sin to be a part of our lives, when we delude ourselves by comforting ourselves with the reminder that God is merciful, or that merely believing in God is sufficient, we are conforming to the world and we are on the worldly path. St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "Sin happens when we refuse to keep growing." Are we growing if we no longer fight the good fight and become complacent with sin? The answer to that is obvious.

Sin is a paralysis of the soul. Although not every physical illness is a direct result of a specific sin or moral shortcoming, all illness is in some mystical way connected with the spiritual condition of a person. Let us remember that the Lord did not intend for man to suffer. God created man for blessedness, joy and happiness in the paradise which God provided for man to live in. It was man's disobedience to God and succumbing to the temptation of the devil that sin, suffering, illness and death entered into our lives.

However, the Fall was not the end of the story of mankind. The Lord, who is longsuffering and most merciful, loves and feels sorrow for man. The Father sent His only-begotten Son into the world in order to breathe new life back into every facet of the existence of mankind, so that everyone would be given new strength and power in order to be able to grow and struggle with sin in this dysfunctional and troubled world. Suffering, illness, and even the experience of death all have a new meaning and purpose for those who take up their cross and follow Christ. Man is not born an adult. A person grows from infancy to childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood, and then finally to old age. It is the same with the spiritual life. When we pray, when we fast, when we repent, when we receive Holy Communion, we are engaged in a

spiritual battle. Even though we may do all of these things, we may feel that we are stuck in a rut and not making any progress. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although we may not see it, we are advancing and growing closer to Christ.

In a mystical way, through our sufferings which we offer to God as a whole burnt offering, the Christian will be purified more and more from sin and will grow towards Christ. Don't be tempted to give up the struggle for even a second. Don't despair when you fall. Pick yourself up and resume the battle. The devil will try and try, but don't give up and don't let him deceive you. When you stand at the crossroad and see the two arrows, choose the spiritual path and be transformed. Growth takes time. It takes hard work. It takes sweat. In Holy Scripture, it even goes so far as to say that it takes blood. If you have made the mistake of allowing sin to be a part of your life, then now is the perfect time to confess your sins and repent. Repent, in Greek, means to change your mind; to change your attitude and change your way of life. In the end you will be glad you faithfully carried your cross. When it comes time to face the Lord on that last day, the Lord will say to us, "Your sins are forgiven. Take up your pallet and walk." And we will enter into the joy of eternal life, the Kingdom of God, to the glory of God the Father, His only-begotten Son, and the All-Holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

