

**SERMON on the Raising of the Paralytic, July 19, 2020**  
**By Archpriest Peter Olsen**

Today the Lord heals a man of physical and spiritual paralysis. Where formerly his legs were paralyzed by illness and he could not walk, now he is freed from his illness and can stand up and walk. Where formerly his heart was stone cold and paralyzed by sin, now the warmth of peace and grace fills his heart because the Lord has forgiven him all that he has done. Our Savior restores the man whole and complete, both spiritually and physically. Physical infirmities on their own prevent no one from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. It is only the spiritual sickness of an unrepentant heart that make it impossible for us to enter into the Kingdom of God. Remember the life of St. Mary of Egypt when she was in Jerusalem standing at the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. When she tried to go into the church, an invisible force pushed her out and would not permit her to enter. It was only after she showed remorse for her sins and repented that the way was opened for her to enter into the church. If her sickness had been physical instead of spiritual, if she had been physically blind, deaf, or even paralyzed, it would have made no difference, she would have been able to enter into the church. Her sickness, however, was of the soul. She lived an extremely impure and dissolute life and therefore it was not possible for her to enter into the holy church. It was this mercy of God that awakened in her the realization that she was a sinner and led her to feel genuine remorse and sorrow for her sins. There are many miracles in our life that we don't see or recognize. The Lord is always arranging things to try to lead us to repentance. It may take days or years or even a lifetime, but the Lord never gives up. There were probably many events in Mary of Egypt's life prior to this that the Lord arranged in order to try to lead her to give up her sinful way of life. It is the same with all of us. Eventually a light bulb goes off over our head and we get it. Eventually realization hits us like a ton of bricks and we see the sorry state of our soul and we begin to feel remorse for our sins. It could be something that someone says. It could be something that we read in a book. It could be a particular passage in Holy Scripture. It could even be an event like what happened in the life of Mary of Egypt. In today's Gospel we don't know what sins the paralytic suffered from. In fact, it is very possible that the physical paralysis that he suffered from was a direct result of the sins that weighed on his soul. Although it is not specifically mentioned in the Gospel, we can infer that the paralytic was sorry for his sins. Perhaps he needed to suffer this physical paralysis before he could feel remorse and sorrow for his sins. We know that he felt sorrow for his sins because the Lord would not have told him that his sins were forgiven if the paralytic did not recognize and feel sorrow for his sins. Notice carefully the sequence. First the man's sins are forgiven, then he is cured of his physical paralysis. Some people wonder why the Lord permits the demons to exist and to tempt us. The holy elder St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain says that it is necessary for us to undergo trials and take "exams" in this life for the sake of the salvation of our soul. These trials, or "exams," help us to see our sins and help us to repent. They teach us humility. The proud cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. We have seen so many times in the lives of the saints, such as Mary of Egypt and Moses the Ethiopian, for example, how the most horrible of sinners, through sincere and heartfelt repentance, can become the greatest of saints. In the Orthodox prayer book, when we say our evening prayers it also says that before going to bed we should make a daily examination of our conscience. In other words, every evening we should recount in our minds the day's events and the words we spoke and the things that we did and judge ourselves based on the law of God. When we see our errors and mistakes, we should not lay down to sleep before begging God to forgive us our sins. And if we have grieved anyone in any way, St. Paul tells us that we should not let the sun go down before we have asked forgiveness from the person whom we have offended. For we do not know, when we lay down to sleep, if we will wake up to see another day in this life, or if perchance the Lord will take our soul that night, and we will wake up instead at the footstool of the Lord on Judgement Day. How awful it would be to die in our sins having not repented, or having grieved someone and having not asked for

forgiveness. The sweetest words that we can hear from our merciful Lord are “Your sins are forgiven you. Go in peace and sin no more.” Amen.