

Homily

The Healing of the Paralytic

Health at any cost! And “True Friendship”

Second Sunday of Great Lent / March 7, 1999

St. Andrew Orthodox Church, Riverside, California

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Introduction: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. Our Gospel text this morning plants us in the middle of a large and pressing crowd, which had surrounded our Savior. They had drawn near to Christ for the same reason that untold numbers of human beings have ever since, and for the same reason that we this morning have gathered before Him in His holy house: *To hear His word*. As was His custom He began to “speak the word to them”. As He was teaching a group of five men approached, and tried to push their way through the crowd. This was impossible due to the fact that only four of the men could walk. The fifth was paralyzed, lying on a cot, and being carried by the four other men. Refusing to be deterred, the four men carried the paralytic up onto to the roof, and right in the middle of our Savior’s preaching began to tear off the roof above the crowd in order to lower down the paralytic from above. Compared to preaching while the roof above you is being torn up, the job of preaching while babies are crying and trains are passing appears the easier of the two.

Our Savior was moved. He looked not only at the men and the paralytic, but right into the hearts of each, perceived that the man suffered physically because of his sins, appraised that their hearts were full of faith, and pronounced an immediate absolution: “My son, your sins are forgiven” (St. Mk. 2:5). This bold statement, necessarily blasphemous if not pronounced by the only One able to forgive men of their sins, shook the unbelieving scribes in the crowd to the core of their beings. They were reasoning in

their hearts, “He is blaspheming...Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Again our Savior read their hearts (He can just as easily read the heart of the sinner as of the believer), and, in order to confound them and show forth His divine authority to forgive sins, He commanded the paralytic, “Rise, take up your pallet, and go home” (St. Mk. 2:11). At this word, to the amazement of all, the paralytic rose and went out in the sight of all. Everyone is left gaping, and in that state of divine wonder which the presence of our Savior always evokes as he perceives, forgives, and heals with no effort but a look and a word. Such is the presence of Christ.

Healing at any cost! From this Gospel account we can pan for much gold. Blessed Nicolai Velimorovic, in his homily on this incident, notes that there are three ways that we encounter the presence of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. First, sometimes, Christ comes directly to us as He did with the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus or in the calling of His disciples. Secondly, sometimes, Christ communicates His presence to us by His apostles, missionaries, and through other believers as one believer brings another. Finally, sometimes, men and women make simply pursue Christ themselves until they have Him (*Homilies*, p. 147). This is the case we find in the Gospel this morning. These four men were determined to do whatever it took to obtain the presence of Christ. They allowed no barrier, no obstacle to hinder their pursuit. They did not accept defeat, were not easily discouraged, and simply did not take their eyes off the goal of attaining until they had definitively done so. What exceptional men!

How many of us would have acted in this way? How many of us would have never even begun the journey to Christ, making this excuse and that, and saying that we were sure He would sometime in the future pass our way at which time we would be able to relate to Him! How many of us, having started out to obtain His presence and that complete health of body and soul which only He can effect, would have encountered the large and pressing crowds and have simply given up and gone back to our “business”? I mean come on! There are already so many people! And besides we are carrying this heavy load! And even if we did make the extra effort to push through the crowds and up the stairs, what would we have done once we literally, not just proverbially, encountered the

“brick wall”! How many of us would have set down the paralytic and begun to rip the wall apart with our bare hands? Oh what an example these men are to us! This is what our Lord means when He says, “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force” (St. Matt. 11:2).

If we are to heal ourselves, soul and body, from the paralysis of sin and ever-encroaching death, we must by all means, at whatever cost find ourselves in the presence of Christ. He is our health and salvation. His divine word will release us from our bondage. And in order to find ourselves in Christ’s presence we must exert ourselves. We must seek Him fervently. We must throw off the inertia of spiritual sickness, not learning to “accept” it and “live with it” but learning to cure it. *We must not allow ourselves to be such slaves to our current ways of living, to routine, and to busyness that we never even mount up onto the cot and start moving!* Get moving. Some of you have yet to translate the reality that we are in Great Lent into your practical schedules. It is time to make haste and make up for lost time. You need to get up on the cot and out of the house, and start moving toward Christ. *Next, we must not be discouraged at the crowd of people that appear to be blocking our access to the Savior.* So, in our Lenten journey, which is our movement toward Christ for healing, we must not be discouraged at the presence at manifold temptations and passions which appear to block our approach to Christ. Whenever anyone is serious about healing themselves from their passions at once they are assaulted by demons, who fear nothing more than a person who is serious about spiritual health. As the paralytic and his four friends pushed through the crowd so too we must push through these temptations and passions. We must prevail over them by honest evaluation and confession, and we must make it then to the stairway that leads to the roof. *We must climb these stairs and then set our hands to breaking through the roof.* These stairs are the spiritual disciplines, and the hard roof, which must be broken through and penetrated, is the human heart. Who will be successful at breaking through? Who will actually find Himself in Christ’s presence? Who will obtain healing? Only he who is willing to move. Only he who is willing to endure and overcome the obstacles. Only he who is willing to climb, and to do forceful spiritual work. There is no Pascha without Great Lent. There is no salvation without labor.

True Friendship- Before we leave this beautiful scene I would like to draw your attention to one more aspect of the account. Notice that the paralytic found his health and salvation through the help of his four friends. He could simply not be saved without them, and they were devoted to his spiritual health. What we have before us is a most beautiful picture of true Christian friendship. True Christian friendship is a friendship of mutual encouragement. It is a relationship in which each party works for the good of the other, where each concerns himself with the salvation of the other. True friends push each other on into the presence of the Lord. They are agents of salvation, not corrupters. Look at how much a friend can assist another! Have you ever thought that your loving efforts in a friendship may be the very thing, which, in the providence and grace of Almighty God, enables your friend to obtain salvation! Let us not underestimate the power of mutual encouragement and help. Let us not think in individualistic terms, but instead recognize that the Lord is saving us together. We are repenting together. We are praying together. We are about the business of good deeds together, and we are making up for each other's weaknesses. In many ways we are being borne on the shoulders of our fellow parishioners and friends into Christ's presence. "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25). Think of Great Lent in this way. How greatly are we helped when we are making our prostrations during Great Compline and are buoyed by the other strugglers on their faces next to us. How much our spirits are lifted to hymn together our most pure Mother in the Akathist Hymn. And if we are neglecting our Lenten duties how are we, in truth, abandoning our friends. One person's fervent participation in Lent increases the fire of many, and one person's non-participation in Lent squelches the zeal of many. I leave you with a word from that pious author of the *Diary of a Russian Priest*, Fr. Alexander Elchaninov, "Individual effort is fruitless in so many cases. See friendship. This is a case when 1 + 1 are not 2, but at least 3: the two of you, plus the great power- mutual love- which will sustain and fortify you" (p. 208). May it be that, helped by each other's love and borne on each other's shoulders, we may find ourselves in the presence of Christ and hear from Him, "My son your sins are forgiven...pick up your pallet and walk!" Δοξα Το Θεο!