

## *God's forgiveness and healing are right now through you and through me.*

What happens in Mark chapter 2 blows the roof off...not only of a house, but of a religious tradition. There is a power issue here. The religious leaders believed that forgiveness of sin was done only by God and would only happen at a future time.

But along comes this early Christian community and the person of Jesus who proclaim that forgiveness happens *now* and that it happens through one another – and *not* just through the religious authority of the time. What is proclaimed here is that the future hope of the Jews for an age of forgiveness has broken in. If these Jesus believers were right, then the power of God has been entrusted to humanity...our forgiveness of one another has lasting consequences. And those consequences begin right now...not tomorrow – God is available, God's power is available as revealed in Jesus, *right now*.

Interior peace is a big deal...it was a big deal back when Jesus lived – reconciliation, forgiveness, a sense of peace and wholeness enabled a person to handle anything, even paralysis. Hence, the first words attributed to Jesus in this story are: "Child, your sins are

forgiven." In the face of faith, God acts now. And notice, it is not the paralytic who has faith, but the four people who carry him. It was their belief in what Jesus could do that brought about this situation – the power of God draws near and invades right now, is available right now...even in the midst of that great confinement there could be peace for this fellow.

Talk about something new! It isn't every day that paralytics get up and walk. You see them as you stroll through the average city neighborhood: the chronic homeless, the alcoholics and addicts, the middle-class types glued to their coffee cups at unsatisfying jobs, the mind-numbingly bored teen-agers, the perennially angry, the seasonally depressed. There are many ways to be a paralytic, interiorly immobilized. Even those who are merrily on the treadmill of upward mobility may be paralyzed in the muscles of charity. And however our lives are progressing, we may each have some corner of our heart that is frozen solid. It could be someone we've long stopped trying to forgive, or a habitual sin we've learned to accommodate. It isn't every day that the paralyzed aspects of our lives get some therapy.

These friends made this moment of God, of forgiveness and healing, present for their sick companion. God is doing something new here: making

God available for the human through the human. The power to forgive sin (estrangement from God) is shared by God with those who would radically share themselves.

Are we not being asked to open ourselves to a new vision of sin, and grace, and reconciliation? Even a new vision of ourselves as believing communities? Is this not what our Church is celebrating in no longer calling penance “confession,” but the sacrament of reconciliation (restoration of community)? The Church, a community of faithful folks, is going out of its way to make way for me, a sinner. Punching a hole and dropping me down through the thatched roof of ecclesiastical stuff, or personal stuff, to have access to God, that I may get what I need and glorify God in my wholeness. The power to forgive sins is available through the sacrament of reconciliation, yes, but also in every moment of human contact which invites the invasion of God. This gospel calls us to reflect on our interactions: to ask ourselves if in fact there are moments of grace and power for new levels of relationship with God.

God touches us not only with the sacrament of Eucharist, but in every human contact which opens us and makes room for forgiveness and healing.

This is a true story as told by Jesuit Fr. Garry Smith writing in 1998: A friend suffered from multiple sclerosis, that insidious disease that slowly and increasingly cripples its sufferers. Once the long haul with MS commenced, he went from a few awkward inconveniences to falling on his face; from a cane to a wheel chair; finally in his last years, he was flat on his back.

A group of close friends came to his aid when he became increasingly ill. He called them “the roofers” – alluding to those famous stretcher-bearers in Mark

chapter 2. They were old friends from his college days and his brief stint with the Jesuits in the 1960s. They collectively decided three years ago to ensure that his last days were taken care of financially. His pension and insurance could not cover all the expenses of his home and the kind of care he needed. So, each month, the “roofers” would send in the bucks to one of their point men who in turn wrote the necessary checks. The group included lawyers, physicians, teachers, architects, blue-collar workers, psychologists and priests. They were comfortable with the obscurity of their mission of love, like their gospel counterparts who worked behind the scenes to attend to a wounded brother. In their role as “roofers” these ordinary friends were extraordinary. At his funeral, one of the roofers preached the homily. After reading the story of the paralytic man and his friends, the “roofer” priest said: “We were indeed the people of the gospel, packing him on his litter, down the alleys, across the river, up the stairs, to the very roof. We pulled off the tiles. We hardly had a choice. He was yanking on us to do so. It really wasn’t hard. He was pretty light, after all. He didn’t complain. His spirits were pretty good most of the time. He used to say, ‘My vocation, during this part of my life, is to lead people to God by their taking care of me.’ It worked. Our hearts opened. He showed us faith; he showed us caring; he showed us forgiveness; he showed us kindness. He led the way to God. Our job was easy. All we did was carry him.”

Let us pray. ...O great God, ever new, may we bring your healing and forgiveness to those whose lives we touch and in turn find that same peace ourselves. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**God’s forgiveness and healing  
are right now through you**