

## Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

Is 43:18-19, 21-22, 24b-25

Ps 41:2-3, 4-5, 13-14

II Cor 1:18-22

Mk 2:1-12

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Some years ago, I was co-directing a weekend retreat for a group of Catholic educators. The other director, a dear friend, is a quadriplegic. Long before I took a look at the readings, we had decided that I would preside on Sunday at the retreat's closing Mass, and Fr. Bill, the quadriplegic co-director, would preach. That Sunday, like this one, was the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, with the same set of readings as today.

Several days before the Mass, I looked at Sunday's readings. I realized that I, along with those on the retreat, would have the experience of hearing the Gospel about the healing of a paralytic proclaimed by a quadriplegic, who would then preach. I resisted the very strong temptation of asking my friend what he planned to say. Instead, I waited in prayerful anticipation.

As Fr. Bill proclaimed the Gospel, the congregation was so focused on him. I sensed a growing awkwardness in the chapel. People seemed to feel that somehow he was in a tough situation. The quadriplegic, however, exhibited nothing but his usual calm.

He began his homily, "Today's Gospel involves a cripple. But I am not sure if he is the story's protagonist." He went on to suggest that there are several possible main characters. Jesus, through his healing actions, is certainly at the center of the story. The man's friends, by their determination to help, cause the encounter to occur. And note, it is their faith, not their crippled friend's, that Jesus commends. Even the scribes, asking the questions we all have, are essential to the story.

It is also evident that the story has several subplots. To name a few: the relationship between the paralytic and his friends, his friends' relationship with Jesus, Jesus' message on the forgiveness of sin, and the scribes reaction to Jesus.

If one considers, along with today's Gospel, the reading from the prophet Isaiah, and the Responsorial Psalm, then clearly the theme which emerges is that of healing. The psalmist asks that our souls be healed. Isaiah points out that God heals us spiritually, even when we are unaware of and might not even desire such healing.

In today's Gospel, if we look closely, Jesus heals on two levels. First, moved by the faith of his friends, Jesus heals the paralytic. He physically heals the man. But the scribes, apparently believing in the maxim that "no good deed should go unpunished," challenge Jesus' actions, words, and motives.

Jesus gets right to the heart of the matter. The scribes, not Jesus, link physical infirmity with sin. Jesus, throughout his ministry, rebukes such a notion. However, Jesus knows that the scribes are right about one thing. Only God can forgive sin. That is, only God can heal our souls. The scribes, like all of us, are impressed by someone who can heal physical infirmity. But Jesus goes much further. He takes this opportunity

to demonstrate his authority over sin and thus reveal his relationship to the Father.

The paralytic who is at the center of the story never says a word. We know nothing about him except two very important things. Jesus healed the man physically. And Jesus healed him spiritually – he forgave the man’s sins.

Today’s readings pose, to each of us, the question: What do I want Jesus to heal in my life? What area of my life is withered and needs new life?

Returning to the chapel with our quadriplegic preacher, Fr. Bill concluded by pointing out the Gospel’s two healings. He said, “Jesus healed both the cripple’s withered legs and his withered heart. I can tell you from my experience here in this wheel chair, that if Jesus offered me the opportunity to walk, I would jump at it. And, I can also tell you with absolute certainty, that if I had to choose between having my withered limbs healed or having my withered heart healed, I would chose, without question, to have my heart healed. What in your life does God need to heal?”

I believe that is why we are here. That is why we gather week after week to celebrate Eucharist. We come so that we might joyfully receive this bread from heaven, this bread that heals our withered hearts. As we receive this Eucharist, let us pray for the grace and the courage to desire and accept God’s healing.