

Sunday II of Great Lent  
Mark 2: 1-12

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's Gospel reading we hear the well-known account of the man who was paralysed and was let down through the roof to see Christ, Who was teaching in a certain house. The image of the friends of this man actually taking apart the roof and lowering him down in order that he would be able to be near the Lord is very powerful indeed. As soon as we hear the first words of this account we immediately recall it in its fulness due to this powerful imagery.

But what is this account set forth to teach us? The Holy Church appoints this Gospel to be read on the second Sunday of the Great Fast each year. Certainly we are to take more from it than the image of the paralytic who is healed by the Lord, picks up his bed, and walks away from the house that his friends had just ripped the roof off of. Should we not ask **why** he was healed of his paralysis? St. Mark, from whose Gospel this account is taken, answers for us the question of why the man was healed. Let us listen:

"When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." (Mark 2:5)

This is the true and important healing which took place on that day in that house. The healing of the man's soul far superceded the healing of his body. Christ healed his physical sickness in order to show the grumbling scribes that His words about healing the man's soul were in fact true. Again, why was the man healed? It was due to the strong faith of the man and his friends. A strong faith. This is a theme which reoccurs throughout the Gospels. From Matthew's Gospel we hear:

"And Jesus said unto them...If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain: Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove. And nothing shall be impossible unto you." (Matt. 17:20)

And from Luke we hear the account of the healing of the servant of the eminent and faithful Centurion:

"When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." (Luke 7:9)

And finally, from John we hear a passage from last evening's Resurrectional Gospel:

"Then saith [Jesus] to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing...[and] Jesus saith unto him: Thomas, because thou has seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20: 27,29)

Faith, brothers and sisters, faith. Everything that the Lord did while He was here on earth was for our salvation, everything He did and said has meaning for us. I have given only a few examples of the many times that the Lord praises those who have a strong and correct faith in Him. This sort of praise and reward would not continually occur in the Holy Gospel were it not meant for our emulation. We must inculcate a strong faith and trust in God, as those who are praised and rewarded in the Gospel accounts did.

But how do we do this, you say? How do we strengthen our faith and trust in God? As in any difficult endeavor we must both struggle ourselves, and at the same time ask the help of God and His saints. The saints had this faith, and they were able to perform miracles due to it, but only with God's help. They also received a more important and lasting reward for their strong faith: the heavenly kingdom. But we should not limit ourselves only to prayer to God and His saints to help us strengthen our faith - we should also read the lives of the saints. In the lives of the saints we see strong faith in action, rather than only in theory. And what better time to begin reading the lives of the saints than during the fast? We should be watching TV less and reading spiritual books more during the fast in any case, why not look at the lives of the saints? For their trust and faith in God the saints were given their reward, and if we read about their lives we will see how they accomplished the difficult task of attaining this heavenly reward. We will see how they suffered, almost every one of them. And further, we will see how they counted their sufferings as nothing, although for us these sufferings might seem almost unbearable. And then we will see how light our own crosses really are. We often feel that we suffer greatly, but when we compare our lives with the lives of God's saints - do we really suffer? St. Paul tells us that God never gives us a greater temptation than we can bear. Often we forget this. Reading the lives of the saints

helps us put our own lives and meager sufferings in proper perspective.

Brothers and sisters - today's Gospel is about faith. About the desire our Lord has for us to have a strong and correct faith in Him, and about the rewards which come from such a strong and correct faith - both in this life and in the next. Let us struggle for such a strong faith, let us implore God that He grant this to us, through the prayers of His most pure mother and of all the saints.

Amen.