

Thursday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mt 9:1-8): After entering a boat, Jesus made the crossing, and came into his own town. And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Courage, child, your sins are forgiven.” At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said, “Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”— he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

“Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.”

Fr. Francesc NICOLAU i Pous
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Today, we find one of the many evangelic manifestations evidencing the merciful goodness of the Lord. They all show many aspects, rich in details. Jesus' compassion, mercifully exerted, goes from resurrecting the dead or healing a leper to forgiving an openly sinful woman; He heals many ailments and accepts repented sinners —as shown in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost drachma and the prodigal son.

Today's Gospel is another instance of the Savior's mercy, in two respects: the illness of the body and the sickness of the soul. And, the soul being more important, is where Jesus starts. He knows the sick man has repented of his faults, He sees his faith and that of those bringing him, and says: “Courage, child, your sins are forgiven” (Mt 9:2).

Why does He start like this without his having been asked to do so? He is, of course, aware of what the paralytic is thinking, and He knows this is what he will appreciate the most; for when facing the sanctity of Jesus, the paralytic might feel confused and ashamed of his own faults, which may hamper his healing. So the Lord wants to put him at ease first. Jesus does not care whether some teachers of the law murmur in their hearts. Not only is a part of his message to prove He has come to show his mercy towards sinners, He now proclaims it.

Thus, while those blinded by their pride think of themselves as the only just ones, and refuse to accept Jesus' claim, those that sincerely consider themselves as sinners, do take Him in. It is towards them that God sees fit to forgive. As St. Augustine says: "For here is great misery, proud man! But there is greater mercy, a humble God!" And, in this case, the divine mercy goes even further: as an additional complement to his forgiveness, He heals the paralytic as well: "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home" (Mt 9:6). Jesus wants the sinner's joy to be complete.

We must reaffirm our confidence in Him. But, we should remember we are also sinners, so let us not close ourselves to his grace.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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"For here is great misery, proud man! But there is greater mercy, a humble God!" (Saint Augustine)

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"The paralytic could not have met Him if there had not been others who carried him on the stretcher. It is always nice to be able to count on people who bring us closer to Jesus through the example of their good works. Personal holiness helps others to be holy." (Benedict XVI)

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"'God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us' (Saint Augustine). To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults (...)" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, N° 1847)