

Date: March 30, 2024

Subject: Second Sunday of Great Lent

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Two weeks of Lent is done; five weeks to go, and Pacha will be here. Let us persevere!

MARK 2: 1-12

And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Despite being born in a sinless condition, all people sin throughout their life on earth. God leaves this tendency to sin in our nature when we are washed free from original sin through our baptism. He does this to enable us to freely choose how we want to live in eternity, with or without Him. By either battling our sinful attacks or submitting to them is the way that we make this choice.

The Lord knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows how difficult it can be for us to find the time and the will to stop and check our true spiritual condition. Therefore, He designates periods of time during the year for this purpose. During these periods, He provides Gospel passages that give us relevant advice and reminders. Let us look at what is given to us in yesterday's Gospel reading.

When reading or hearing this Gospel, one might ask: why did the Savior first tell the sick man, *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee*, and only heal him afterward? The answer is clear: it was the man's sinfulness that had made him sick. Therefore, in order for him to be healed, he needed to be first freed from his sins.

Sins are a spiritual poison. Upon entering the person, they begins to sicken him in his very soul. His sinfulness separates him from God, which deprives him of grace. Without grace, there is nothing a person can do to heal himself. And as long as the poison remains in him, he becomes sicker and sicker, being in a spiritually dead condition. Eventually he dies and is lost to salvation.

There is only one way that the sinner can be spiritually healed. The poison must be extracted. And the only way that this can be done is through sincere confession to God. Through confession, the sinner's sins are washed away, and he is returned back into the body of the Church, which connects him again to grace. The grace vivifies the person's soul and conscience making it once again worthy to God. The physical illness may still continue, even though the person is spiritually healed. God often allows the physical ailments to continue if this is conducive to a person's salvation.

Almsgiving and doing worthy spiritual deeds are very pleasing to God. And He rewards us for doing them, at times even here on earth. We see something in this Gospel passage that should greatly encourage us. *When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.* Jesus healed the sick man as a reward to his *friends* for the act of love and charity that they did on his behalf. That is how much God values and rewards such acts of love for one's neighbor.

God wants love to be the motivator in the manner in which we live. He does not want us to act according to a blind and rigid obedience to His Law. Being motivated by the latter could make us cold, unfeeling, and heartless people. God's laws are not prohibitions, but rather guides on how to correctly act, being motivated by true love. As Scripture warns: *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* We see a perfect example of this truth in the way that the scribes, Pharisees, who were perfect in God's law, rejected the miracle that Jesus performed because it was not done in accordance to the letter of God's Law.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when we think about how much God loves us and wants to save us, how can we not respond in kind? Yes, we are weak and unable to live fully according to His commandments. But His love is so powerful that He will forgive us for anything, no matter what we do, if we repent and change. Therefore, let us take full advantage of this Lenten period provided by Him for us to identify anything and everything that we may have done against Him or our neighbor, which is equal to our having done it to Him. And let us not let our guard down after Pascha and lose the benefit Great Lent gives us. What a wonderful eternity is ours if we do this!

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar