6th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

 “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Why would Jesus say to a man who can’t walk ‘Your sins are forgiven you?’

When Jesus said to the paralytic “My son, your sins are forgiven” some people recoiled in shock. What audacity Jesus had. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Why is this itinerant preacher speaking blasphemy, offering forgiveness when the man seeks healing?

Ultimately, what does forgiving sins have to do with sickness and healing? Here is precisely the center of the story, and the epicenter of Christ’s entire ministry on earth. Jesus came not to simply make people physically well. The crucial problem for humanity isn’t some physical ailment, but it is sin and death itself. Through sin, humanity turns away and separates from God, and this departure from the Source of Life ultimately leads to death. Our sin has distorted the divine image of God within us and made us mortal. Thus, for ultimate healing to occur, Christ addresses the root problem – our sins. By offering forgiveness, he offers the ultimate, holistic healing.

Here lies the Good News that Christ brought into the world, and which we proclaim and live in our Churches – that our Lord Jesus loves us and longs to heal us of all our infirmities, starting from the sickness of sin and its consequence, death itself.

Jesus knows that everyone who comes to him - whether a religious, scholarly Pharisee or a simple, illiterate villager - each have a past filled with sins, mistakes, failures and shortcoming. The FIRST thing that our Lord says to every and any person who comes to him is – Your sins are forgiven!  Christ wants to free us from the burdens that hold us down. “Come to me all who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest… I will not cast away anyone who comes to me… I am with you always.”

Jesus offers His blessing to those who will receive it. Always remember, the blessing of our Lord comes first. Following that blessing, then comes the responsibility of being healed. God offers us new life, now, what are we going to do with it? Are we going to return to the old life we were living previously? Does our encounter with God mean anything to us? Will we allow Christ to not only heal us, but to “create in us a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within us”

Maybe this is why, in another story in the Gospel of John, Jesus asked the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, “Do you want to be made well?” Does someone ,who has been paralyzed for 38 years want to be healed?!? Jesus is asking the many, “Do you understand the responsibility that comes with being healed, with becoming whole? Are you ready to accept the blessing, and then fulfill your responsibility?”

In order to be healed, truly healed in body and soul, God looks into our hearts and sees whether we are open – not open to healing, but open to Him. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom sums up this point in a beautiful way:

*“When we come to God, asking Him to heal us, we must prepare ourselves beforehand for healing. To be healed does not mean to become whole only in order to go back to the same kind of life that we lived before; it means to be whole in order to begin a new life. Do we agree to take upon ourselves the responsibility of a new wholeness, in order to enter again, and yet again, into the world in which we live, with knowledge of our renewal; to be light, to be salt, to be joy, to be hope, to be love, to be giving back to God and man?”*

So today, let each of us reflect on what healing we each need in our own lives. With faith, let us turn to God with a sincere appeal. With the faith of the paralyzed man in today’s Gospel, let us seek out healing, and expect a miracle. But let us also be prepared to then live our lives in a new, redeemed manner. Let’s accept the blessing, and then fulfill our responsibility in living a life as a “new creation,” one filled with God’s light and love and grace, so that we can become His ambassadors in sharing this Good News with the world around us.