Paralytic Man, Second Sunday of Great Lent

We all know what it’s like to want to stay in bed in the morning. We’re sleepy, comfortable, and warm; we would like to turn off the alarm clock and go back to sleep. Now it’s fine to do that every once in a while when we really don’t need to get up and get going. But if we get in the habit of sleeping in, we’ll probably lose our jobs, neglect our families, do poorly in school, and be less than the people God wants us to be.

And if we’re tempted to stay in bed sometimes, imagine how the paralyzed man in our gospel reading felt. He had probably stayed in bed his whole life; he could move only if people carried him. But Jesus Christ not only forgave his sins that day, He gave him the ability to stand up and walk. In fact, He commanded Him to “arise, take up your bed, and go to your home.” He was to get on with living the new life that Christ had given him.

This miracle speaks to us all, of course, because we are sinners paralyzed by our own actions and those of others.  We have made ourselves so sick and weak that we do not have the strength to eradicate the presence of evil in our lives.  Just think for a moment of how easily we fall into words, thoughts, and deeds that we know are not holy.  Our habitual sins have become second nature to us; left to our own resources we are no more able to make them go away than a paralyzed man is to get up and walk.

Despite our best intentions, we live like slaves to our self-centered desires: pride, envy, anger, lust, self-righteousness, fear, laziness, and gluttony so easily paralyze us. Sin has put down roots in our bad habits of how we think, act, speak, and relate to others and to God

The good news is that we can all still do what so many truly repentant sinners did when they encountered Jesus Christ: In humility, they opened their lives to His mercy. They touched the hem of His garment and fell down before Him; they cried, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief” from the depths of their hearts; they left their nets, gave their goods to the poor, and literally gave up their lives to be His disciples and apostles. Like us, they were weakened by their sins and afraid of what the new life in Christ would entail

 No, we do not have to become monks and nuns in order to do that.  But we do need to do everything that we can to open ourselves to the healing energies of God.  When we pray, fast, give to the needy, and practice forgiveness and reconciliation, or any other act of truth faithfulness or repentance, we do so in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, alive and active in us.   Even the smallest bits of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” that we experience are the fruits of the Spirit’s presence.  (Gal. 5:22)  We should cherish them as such and do what we can to help them grow and become characteristic of our lives and personalities. The truth is that if we want to know Christ’s healing and strength, we have to obey His commandments, for He calls us all to get up and move forward in a holy life.  In order to do that, we have to welcome and cooperate with our Lord’s mercy.

If we take Lent seriously, we will often feel like someone recovering from paralysis or in physical therapy.. Often we will be tempted to stay in bed, to give up and take it easy. But how truly wonderful it will be for us to use Lent as a time to wake-up, to recognize that it is through the challenges of repentance that we open our lives to the healing and peace of the Lord. Let us use these few weeks to turn from the weakness and slavery of sin to enter more fully into the strength and blessedness of life eternal that shines so brightly at Pascha. For the Lord’s command also applies to us: “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” In other words, accept and live the new life that Christ has given you. This was good, though difficult, news for the paralyzed man to receive; now it’s our turn to follow his example, to trust that the Lord really can heal us, and to obey His command to get on with our lives to the glory of God.