

I want to point out a few subtle things from today's Gospel reading that shed great light on our Catholic faith.

Story of the paralytic. Four men carry the man on sort of a stretcher, going to great lengths tearing off the roof → thatch? → handing him down. Notice what the reading says: "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic 'Your sins are forgiven.'" This highlights our connectedness in the faith, communal nature of faith, bound together in communion before God.

Frankly, many other Christians hold a skewed view of the Christian faith from this perspective. Protestant and Evangelicals: fiercely hold to the creed Me and God Alone, and while certainly we Catholics believe that a personal relationship with God is necessary, it must always be seen in the context of our communion with each other before God. To put it simply: Me and God must always be joined to We and God. Where does the rubber meet the road here concerning our Catholic faith?

- a) Intercession of the saints in heaven. When we call on them they pray for us and help us from heaven. Put yourself in that stretcher as the paralytic and spiritually imagine those 4 men are the saints leading you to Jesus, and apply the words of the Gospel "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic 'Your sins are forgiven.'" When Jesus sees the pure faith of the saints especially Mary interceding with Him on our behalf, He rushes to help us.
- b) Or imagine for a moment Purgatory and someone you know or love died, yes, in the state of grace but still with the stain of venial sin on their soul or died not having made up for their past sins as penance that sorrow for sin requires. And again spiritually imagine that you are one of those 4 men in the Gospel, carrying the spiritually paralyzed to Jesus by your prayers and the masses you offer for the dead – or indulgences. Again, to use the words of the Gospel "Seeing their faith, He said to the paralytic 'Rise, pick up your mat and go home.'" Seeing your faith, Jesus more readily purifies those deceased who are being cleansed in purgatory.

The main point here is that our salvation and sanctification is not simply Me and God. We are bound together by the will of God in a spiritual fabric meant to help each other and God Himself responds to me and you for the good of another. So we see in this Gospel story a real basis for the true teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the Saints and Purgatory. But even here on earth then, imagine the power of our intercession for others, the offering of prayer and sacrifice for the salvation of others.

Great spiritual exercise: think of someone that annoys you. Better yet, think of someone that makes you angry or has hurt you in some way or someone who is involved in evil and is doing great harm to others. What is usually our first reaction to someone like this? To complain and then to condemn in our hearts? What do you think God would ask us about them? I think God would ask us and I think I hear Him whisper this to me when I get all walled up against someone.

I think God asks us

"What did you do for them?"

“Did you pray for them?”

“Did you fast or offer sacrifice for them?”

“Did you lower them to me as the paralytic was lowered and was healed and forgiven?”

How often do we rather stand by, arms crossed, and hard hearted against our enemies?

We are, all of us, friend and foe alike, connected in a spiritual fabric. Our faith and our lives have been helped many times over by others, especially Mary and the saints, lowering us down to Jesus to be healed and forgiven. How can we not do the same for others?

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 7th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2012.