

Dearly beloved: Christ is among us!

On this second Sunday of Lent in the Gospel according to St. Mark, Jesus forgives the sins of a paralyzed man and then, after healing the man spiritually, Jesus heals him physically. The scribes, among the religious leaders of Jesus' day, are scandalized that anyone would dare forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins. Without saying the words "I am God" Jesus made clear that He is God by forgiving the man his sins.

It is in God's power to forgive sins. And we know that God is the same (Hebrews 1:12) from generation to generation. He is "Master of all, Lord of heaven and earth, and of all creation both visible and invisible...without beginning, invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable, and immutable." (Anaphora, Liturgy of St. Basil) God does "not despise the sinner, but instead have appointed repentance unto salvation."

God is always eager to forgive us our sins. In the parable of the prodigal son, the Father rushes out to meet his returning son on the road, so eager is he to restore the sinner. Again and again in the lives of the saints we read how those who may have spent years in the wilderness of sin are forgiven by God by their inner turning of their heart back to God, regardless if they lived for one hour or decades more.

God's forgiveness of our sins flows from His very nature as God. And no matter our sin, whatever it may be, God will forgive us when we turn to Him in repentance. "As a handful of sand thrown into the great sea, so are the sins of all flesh in comparison with the mind of God." (St. Isaac of Nineveh) What sin can tilt the balance of justice against the precious blood of Christ shed on the Cross for us? Jesus was murdered and died for the forgiveness of our sins. (St. Amphilochios) Knowing that God is quick to forgive us when we repent, every day we must then live in the state of repentance: in sorrow for our sins, confessing our unworthiness to God and realizing that He loves us beyond compare. We must waste no time, thinking we will repent tomorrow because tomorrow is promised to no one.

Our repentance before God faces a continual temptation: to judge the sins of others, both inside and outside of the Church. If we repent and fast and pray and give alms "yet see someone in sin and denigrate them, all of our repentance is in vain...by not leaving judgment to the Divine Judge, and by not attending to our own sins. Because in this life we are all in a doctor's waiting room: one person who suffers in their eyes, another's whose hands hurt, another who suffers from sickness within the body." These sickness can be compared to the different sins into which we fall: pride, lust, gluttony, judging others. When we're in a doctor's waiting room or an ER, we are one among many who are in pain. "Do we go and ask, what are you suffering from? Are

we not concerned about our own pain? If we had the pain of our own sins before us, we would not be able to see anyone else sinning. Each person in the waiting room is keeping watch over him or her self.” (Abba Isaiah)

By looking at other’s sins we take the focus off of ourselves, hoping to distract God and even ourselves from our sins. But God is a good and patient Father. He waits for us, even follows after us, waiting for us to stop making excuses for our sins, to stop pointing out other people’s sins. God waits for us to turn inside our own hearts and confess to Him not how this person or that person “makes” me sin, because no one “makes” us sin, sin is our own doing. Or how infuriated I become seeing someone else’s sin. God awaits us turning our eyes on our sins and realize that no one has sinned as we have. That we each can say “I am the first among sinners.” Then God receives us and we find the beginning of our healing which comes with being close to Him. In forgiving us God wraps us up in His love, in Himself. He comforts us, He restores us, He gives us His life by which we may live to the full. And we receive of His life in the Holy Eucharist, receiving the Body and Blood of Christ for the remission of our sins and unto life everlasting.

As we continue the journey of a lifetime, the journey to God, may we not look to see our neighbor’s sins but rather come to our heavenly Father confessing our sins, our unworthiness, praying for the salvation of all.