

Homily  
February 22, 2009

### Introduction

As a kind of preliminary observation, it does seem to me, after an informal poll of friends, that the Gospel we just heard features a youthful initiative. This may not be strictly scriptural but the circumstances around Jesus' cure of the paralyzed man speak of young people. When they cannot get near to Jesus, the four that are carrying the paralytic hop up on the roof and begin to tear away the tile and thatch. And one can almost hear their shouts and excitement when they lower their friend through the opening they have made down to the feet of Jesus: "CAREFUL, DON'T DROP HIM; TAKE IT EASY!! And Jesus must have been delighted with their exuberance. After all he was a young man as well - about 30 years old.

### I

Much closer to the scriptural text of course is the fact that this was a community operation. Four people carrying the paralytic, and who knows how many others accompanying them. And Jesus recognizes that fact as the Gospel says: "When he saw THEIR faith, he said to the paralytic 'your sins are forgiven'".

What Jesus does here - forgive sins and prove that he can forgive by then curing the paralytic - is a clear example of what God promises in today's first reading from Isaiah: "See, I am doing something new... now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

And of course there are ever with Jesus those who will not accept the new - the religious traditionalists who accuse Jesus of blasphemy here in the very early days of his ministry and indeed throughout his public life.

### II

Like all Scripture lessons these are not faint memories - realities of another time. God is always doing something new.

Take for example what we will begin this coming Wednesday, the season of Lent 2009.

Our understanding of Lent has deepened and expanded over the years, hasn't it. From a kind of rigorous set of observances around how much or how little we eat and what we should give up, we now understand Lent as a complete season, a holistic time when we do at least three things:

1. We ask God's mercy and forbearance for our personal sins and for the sins of our country, our world, and, yes, our Church. We know the list of divisions, hurts, injustices that beset these areas of life and there is no need to catalogue them here once again.

2. We attend also to our individual and family's spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical well-being.
  - physically, we try to eat conscious of a starving world these are we attempt to get the right amount of exercise all we strive to take proper rest disciplines
  - emotionally, this care of our bodies leads to a quieting of our nervous system, a calming of our frenetic pace.
  - intellectually, then we find ourselves able to think more clearly, read useful literature and nourish our minds.
  - spiritually, in the ensuing fruitful new-found silence we encounter the Divine, our Source, our Destiny, and our loving Mother/Father God.
  
3. Finally, we prepare over the 40 days of Lent for the commemoration of the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ, the great moment we call Holy Week and Easter.

### III

These goals and objectives of Lent are the "something new" that God is doing in and through us in our times. And God is doing this in us as community, not only as individuals, particularly here at Our Lady Queen of Peace.

### Conclusion

Let me conclude by anticipating what we shall do this coming Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. Many of us will come here for Mass even though it is not obligatory. So many find Ash Wednesday a moment when we want to be here. We shall sign each other with ashes on our foreheads as signaling our repentance. It's for us a Nineveh moment when that city heard and accepted the warning of Jonah the Prophet about its infidelities and thereby averted disaster. We are surely in a Jonah time today.

On Wednesday we shall sing the wonderful hymn "Ashes" as a summary statement of all that day and this season signifies. So let's now on this Sunday before Lent begins sing one verse of that song as a kind of anticipation of what we begin this Wednesday:

"We rise again from ashes, let healing come to pain. Though spring has turned to winter and sunshine turned to rain. The rain we'll use for growing to create the world anew. From an offering of ashes, an offering to you."