

"Behold, some people brought to [Jesus] a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.'"

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro: The Lord's blessings to each and every one of you on this rather brisk Lord's day, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I have to say, I know that for many of you who can't stand cold weather, this won't be the case, but for me, dear ones, the Lord has caused me to rejoice in no small measure now that the bitterness of the summer heat has finally departed and the heavenly season of fall is now in full swing. For some time, the terrible heat had me on the brink of despair, but now the Lord in His great mercy has used the cool weather to turn my sorrow into gladness.

Well our Gospel lesson for today is one of my very favorite and most cherished in the entire lectionary. I love it so dearly because it does such a brilliant job capturing the radiant splendor of our Savior's work as the Great Physician. Our text is written in Matt. 9, which is after our Lord's most famous sermon that He preaches--the Sermon on the Mount--which is recorded for us in chapters 5 through 7. And just after He finishes His blessed teaching in that magnificent sermon, we see our Lord performing simply astounding miracles all through chapters 8 and 9. And what we're of course meant to see, dear ones, is that just as preaching and teaching are core aspects or facets of Jesus' ministry, the same is true for healing. In fact, St. Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives a summary statement of Christ's ministry towards the end of ch. 9 in v. 35. He writes, "Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."

Teaching, preaching, and healing are the core elements of His ministry. They can't be separated from one another. Both His teaching and preaching illumine the mind and restore the soul, and His healing miracles restore the body. And what's on full display for us in our Gospel lesson today is the paralytic, whom Jesus restores in both his body and his soul. But here's what I want you to see today, dear ones--here's what I want you to focus on--which of these two is our Savior's priority? To be sure, He comes to restore mankind to wholeness in body and soul, but tell me, which of these two is, for Him, of first importance, and is the same true for you?

Body Paragraphs

I. Now, if I were a betting man, I'd wager an exceptionally large sum of money that when the friends of the paralytic bring him to Jesus, they did so with a singular expectation--that Jesus

would heal his body so that he could walk, of course, and that our Lord would do so without delay. But initially that's not what happens, dear ones. Listen to what the text says:

"When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.'" Our Lord here subverts our expectations. He doesn't first heal the paralytic in his body. Instead, He heals the man's soul proclaiming to Him the forgiveness of his sins, raising him up spiritually. Christ gives the paralytic the benefit which He would soon win for us on the cross by His sacrificial death--death by which He made atonement and restitution for all our sins. Christ obtains forgiveness for us through His cross and dispenses that forgiveness ahead of time to the paralytic. And the text, in fact, leads us to conclude that that was all our Lord was going to do were it not for the wicked thoughts in the hearts of the scribes. Look what Jesus says, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?...But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he then said to the paralytic--"Rise, pick up your bed and go home."

The miracle of Christ healing the man's body was only done to demonstrate His authority to forgive sins, and to heal the soul in this way. And the crowds perceived this very thing. Our text says that when they saw the man get up and go home, "they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men"--that is, the authority to forgive sins.

For us, then, it's clear what the Great Physician's priority is. He's concerned first and foremost with healing our souls. Because what does it profit a man if he gains healing for his body or even gains the whole world but loses his soul? What does it profit you if you regain your physical health, but your soul is dead and in a state of decay, cut off from the life of God so that your body becomes a tomb?--a tomb with flesh and bones which will, in the end, wither away and outwardly reflect your inner condition?

II. The Lord Jesus Christ, our divine Physician, wants to heal us from the inside out, dear ones. And until the general resurrection, the condition of our souls is His primary concern, and it should be ours too. As important as our physical health is, we should consider our spiritual health even more important.

Whether we act on it or not, we all know the tremendous value in visiting a doctor on a regular basis to be physically examined for the health of our bodies. We may not even feel like anything's wrong, but that doesn't mean there's not. Well how much more is this true spiritually? How much more do we need to have our conscience regularly examined and our souls regularly cleansed of sin through confession and absolution?

These are the two parts of confession: first, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. Christ has given the authority to forgive sins to rightly called and ordained pastors in the Church. In this way, we pastors are spiritual fathers and physicians; we're caretakers of the soul; and in this way, the church is rightly seen as a hospital. This is where healing for your soul is to be found because this is where Christ found. And He speaks His curative absolution through the mouth of the Pastor to us as He did for the paralytic.

I cannot encourage you strongly enough to avail yourself of the medicine offered to you in private confession especially. The general confession of sins we do in the beginning of the holy liturgy most certainly should not overshadow or do away with completely the divine treasure of private confession and absolution, of confessing real sins to God and hearing His Word of forgiveness spoken to us directly, personally for those very sins which plague us.

III. Objections to private confession/absolution to address:

1. I don't feel like I need it.
2. I'm not used to doing private confession.
3. I don't want my pastor to think less of me because of what I confess.

IV. Dangers of not going to private confession:

1. In the short term, you may grow accustomed to or even comfortable with your sins.
2. In the long term, you become unpracticed in confessing your sins to God and receiving His forgiveness, which sets you up for a difficult time on the deathbed at the end of your life when Satan so often assails and besieges the conscience, bringing up all manner of sins and evil deeds to tempt you to despair.

Conclusion

If you haven't prioritized your spiritual health over your physical health, now is the time. Now's the time to deepen your spiritual life and your seriousness about it as a Christian.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.