

We hear in our first reading that Israel has wearied, has grown tired of God. They refused to call on His name, to seek Him, do be in relationship with Him. Despite that, God promised to do something new, something unheard of, something almost unspeakable.... He would remember their sins no more.

Sin is often equated with sickness in Scripture (see Psalm 103:39). And today's Psalm reads like a foretelling of the Gospel scene - the man is helped on his sickbed, healed of his sins, and made able to stand before the Lord forever.

Today's Gospel makes clear to us today what has been implied in preceding weeks. Namely, that in healing the sick and casting out demons, Jesus is making known God's forgiveness of His people's sins.

Now the scribes know that God alone can forgive sins. That's why they accuse Jesus of blasphemy. He appears to be claiming equality with God.

But the Gospel today turns on this recognition. The scene marks the first time in the gospels that Jesus commends the faith of a person or persons who come to Him (see Matthew 9:2; Luke 5:20).

With the eyes of faith, the paralytic and his friends can see what the scribes cannot - Jesus' divine identity. He reveals himself as the "Son of Man" - alluding both to the incarnation and to the mysterious heavenly figure that the prophet Daniel saw receive kingship over all the earth (see Daniel 7:13-14).

Even His retort to the scribes even echoes what God said to Pharaoh when He sent plagues upon Egypt: "That you may know that I am the Lord" (see Exodus 8:18; 9:14).

"That you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth" "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."

As Paul says in today's Epistle, Jesus is God's great Amen. Amen means "so be it." In Jesus, God has said, "So be it," fulfilling all His promises throughout salvation history. Jesus is the something new! And through Him and Him alone do we find God and Mercy.

We are the new people He formed to announce His praise. He calls each of us what Jesus calls the paralytic - His child (see 2 Corinthians 6:18).

But do we share this man's faith? Do we share even the faith of his friends? To what lengths are we willing to go to encounter Jesus?

We have been speaking for the last several weeks about sin. And it is the same this week. I know that no one likes hearing about sin..... But it is a paradox that only in knowing our sinfulness, can we truly understand the great ocean of forgiveness that is God's Mercy.

This is the last Sunday Gospel before we begin Lent. Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and charity. It is also a time of deeper reflection on our human and spiritual condition.

Lent affords us an opportunity of acknowledging our sin, of facing the reality of our acts of disobedience, in fact, of understanding the nature of sin itself and in doing so we come to know better, both ourselves and our God.

We have been hearing the accounts of how Jesus cast out a demon, cured a leper and today, heals a man that is paralyzed.

The casting out of a demon points out to us that sin is not of God. It has a much different origin. What is in us that is not of God? Why do we let it be there? Are we willing to be free of it?

Are we like those ancient Israelites, grown tired of God, becoming lazy in prayer? Are we like lepers, our souls slowly rotting amid our desires and crying out to God, "unclean..... unclean"

These are not pretty questions, they are gritty and honest and take fortitude to both ask and answer.

Lent gives us the chance to see ourselves if we are in this state and to grow in faith enough to say as the leper did, "If you wish, you can make me clean"

Lenten practices give us the courage to ask if we are in the terrible place of spiritual paralysis, unable to move ourselves and in need of others to place us in front of His healing power and grace.

Hopefully we use this gift of forty days to ask God to show us our own demons, our own leprosy, our own paralysis.

Some of the messages we can take with us today, into this time of Lent are: Take Courage, Be Not afraid! Jesus has overcome the darkness, we might be entering the desert but God has made a path in the desert.

No sin is too great for God's mercy and forgiveness. He makes all things new. We do not have to be laid down, unable to walk in freedom any longer.

Jesus, the Son of Man has come among us and has the power and authority to forgive us all our sins and make us whole.

Do not grow weary....., Call on the Name of God!

I pray we can use this upcoming holy season to "Pick up Our Mats and go home to God, walking in His light and Mercy, sharing the joy of His resurrection.