

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

God revealed Himself to the Prophet Isaiah. He revealed Himself as the God who forgives sin: "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins", says the Lord. It is by the forgiveness of sins that God redeems fallen man. God alone can forgive sins. This forgiveness, this mercy and grace of God, this manifestation of God's great love for His fallen creatures, was revealed also to David, who knew first-hand about sin and redemption, about transgression and forgiveness.

By the Spirit's guidance, David wrote of the God that forgave him: "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him."

The scribes in Nazareth, the city St. Matthew refers to as the Lord's "own city", knew these verses well. Only God can forgive sins. So they were scandalized by the Lord's Words. They had brought to Him a paralytic. He did not say "Be healed!" He employed no potions or incantations. He desired to give the man a greater healing, an eternal healing.

St. Matthew testifies that the Lord said to the paralytic "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you." Walking or not, limbs strong or helpless, heaven was open to him. Live or die, eternal life was now his. Holiness was now his. He who was too unclean for the scribes to stoop and touch was now reconciled to God. That is true healing, healing that only God can give.

We confess that God the Father is our Creator; that God the Son is our Redeemer; and that God the Holy Ghost is our Sanctifier. To forgive the sins of the paralytic is the redemptive work of the Son. But God the Son is fully God. All things were made through Him. He was beside God the Father at the creation, the Master Craftsman whose delight was with the sons of men. So was His delight expressed in the forgiveness of the sins of the paralytic. But the Son too has power over the creation, fallen though it may be.

He stills storms. He withers unproductive trees. He speaks and water becomes wine. He multiplies fish and loaves. He speaks and the dead rise. He commands the creation with a Word. So He rebukes the scribes, saying "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you', or to say 'Arise and walk?'"

Then He does not say "But that you know that the Son of Man has power on earth to heal", although He certainly has that power. He proved it. Rather He heals with a Word, using the healing as proof that He has the Divine Power to forgive sins. Thanks be to God!

The same Lord makes you a promise: "I am the saving health of My people, in whatever tribulation they cry to Me I will hear them." In this world of death and perversion, in this life of corruption, deceitful lusts and lying, the Lord's Words bring great comfort and hope to those who believe. For the world around you is very sick. And with that sickness you too have been infected.

Consider the description the Apostle gives of the state of the fallen world: “In the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

That is true paralysis, the inability to know God, the hubris to reject His Word, which is to reject His grace and mercy. And by your sins you have merited only the wrath of God, and His condemnation.

But God be praised, as easily as Christ healed the paralytic, so does He heal you – of afflictions of body, yes, but more importantly of afflictions of soul. For the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.

So the Apostle writes “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” God has forgiven you in Christ. He has proclaimed you to be innocent, to be holy, to be without sin. You are healed! So be of good cheer, O Christian.

The forgiveness that God gives you in Christ was Blood-bought. The One who healed the paralytic was Himself paralyzed - by death. The stone tomb was his bed. But He alone had the power to lay down His life, and He alone had the power to take it up again. And He did both – lay it down, and take it up again – for you. When the men brought the paralytic to the Lord, He saw their faith. It is that faith, saving faith, that the same Lord grants you, that you believe in Him, and that believing, you receive true healing: the forgiveness of your sins.

St. Matthew records that the multitudes that saw the healing marveled, and glorified God. They glorified God because He had given such power to men, the power to forgive sins, the power to truly heal. So did the same Christ breathe on His disciples and say to them “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them...”

Thanks be to God that He has given such power to men, to men chosen and called and marked and gifted by the laying on of hands. For that is how Christ’s forgiveness is made your forgiveness this day. It is made yours in the font, the womb of the Church. That is where you put on the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Christ’s forgiveness is made yours as the Gospel enters your ears and fills your soul. It is made yours as Christ’s forgiveness is proclaimed to be yours, as you confess your sins in contrition and faith. And His forgiveness is made yours as His Body is placed into your mouth and His Blood is poured across your lips.

Healed by the Christ that comes to you, you can be as the Apostle writes: “...kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Christ comes to you for your healing. So you, with faithful Jacob, can proclaim “Surely the Lord is in this place! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!”

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