

HOMILY: 7th SUNDAY ORD TIME – CYCLE B – 2012

As I look out at the people here in this church this morning,... I can't help but notice what a very diverse group we are....I see the young and the not so young...I see professional people, and blue collar types,...retired people, students at all ages,...parents, small children, grandparents, single folks... All in all, we have quite an assortment here...Not unlike the crowd in our Gospel story that jammed themselves into the house where Jesus was preaching...That must've been a pretty diverse group too: beggars and peasants, ...working class people,...tax collectors and prostitutes,...Scribes, the religious experts,...and of course Jesus' disciples.

And what brought them to that house that day should be the same reason all of us are here today: JESUS IS IN THE HOUSE...Whether we've come with a faith that is solid or one that is shaky, ...whether we've come with a heavy burden or with everything going good in our life...whatever our situation,...we should be here for one reason: JESUS IS HERE! ...We can be sure this morning,...that the Good Shepherd is in the house...the King of Kings is on the premises...the One who makes the lame walk and the mute talk is here...the mighty Savior is present...Jesus IS IN THE HOUSE!...And we've come not expecting a show, not expecting to be entertained...We've come expecting to meet Jesus,.. encounter Jesus....just like the crowd that filled that small house in Capernaum...They came to see & hear, maybe even touch Jesus

I think it's important that we seize every opportunity to encounter Jesus...Why?...Because every encounter with Jesus is potentially a life-changing one...It can change us in a profound, significant way...Throughout the Gospels we see that almost every time someone came upon Jesus, ...they had a life-changing experience...We certainly saw that with those first disciples....After their first contact with Jesus,...their lives changed completely; they would never be the same. We saw that in last week's Gospel with the leper who came to Jesus as an untouchable outcast, and went away totally cleansed and singing the Lord's praises to all who would listen...And in today's Gospel,...the paralytic – imprisoned in a limp, lifeless body – is brought to Jesus who frees him not only from his physical prison,...but from the prison of His sin....NO ONE who truly encounters Jesus can come away unchanged.

Ok, if we buy into that, that NO ONE who truly encounters Jesus can come away unchanged, and if we really believe that Jesus IS HERE,..then shouldn't we also believe that our encounter with Him today in this church will touch us in some way, change us in some way?...Sure, that would be a lot easier to believe if Jesus was right here where we could see Him and touch Him like He was for the disciples and the leper and the paralytic and all those other people who encountered Him 2000 yrs ago...It'd be a different story if Jesus was standing up here instead of me...For one thing, we'd have a lot of company. This church would be overflowing...There'd be a throng outside trying to push their way in, straining to see Jesus, to hear Him,...to get to Him...There might even be a few as desperate as the paralyzed man and his four friends, trying to come in through the roof... Well, Jesus isn't standing up here, but Jesus IS here,...for us, and it'd be a shame to let this hour go by without letting Him affect us in some good way.

There are two principal ways Jesus is here for us at Mass...We hear His voice in the Liturgy of the Word, speaking to us through the proclamation of the Gospel, and through the voice and words of the preacher:... teaching us, guiding us, challenging us, reassuring us....And Jesus is present on the altar as the priest prayerfully recalls His sacrifice on the Cross and repeats His words at the Last Supper promising us that it is truly His Body and Blood we are receiving in the consecrated Bread and Wine...uniting Himself with us,...nourishing and strengthening us to stay on the path He has called us to follow...Yes, Jesus is here in the Word of God...He IS the Word of God,...and He's here in the Sacrament of the Eucharist...Here for us...If we come in faith.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus responded to the needs of those who came to Him in faith, ...whether their faith was as small as a mustard seed...or as great as the faith of the crippled man and his friends in our Gospel who didn't let any barriers and obstacles keep them from getting to Jesus ...When we come in faith – whether it's a solid faith or shaky one – Jesus is here ready to tell us what we need to hear, ...ready to give us what He knows we need...

In our Gospel story, the faith of the paralytic and his friends would not let anything keep them from getting to Jesus....They could've given up when they got to the house and saw that they couldn't get in, let alone get close to Jesus...But they found a way...My friends, we can't afford to come to church and let anything keep us from getting to Jesus...We can't allow ourselves to be distracted: "Oh, it's too hot in here...or it's too cold in here."..."I don't like the music."..."The preacher is boring."..."I'm mad because somebody sat in my spot."..."My mother made me come."..."I had a bad week....I had a bad year...I had a bad life."...Those are all excuses...and you know, excuses are like feet...Everybody has a couple, and they all stink...We need to come to Mass determined to let nothing keep us from encountering Jesus....from experiencing Jesus....from hearing Him speak to us...from feeling Him touch us and maybe even change us.

Each of us, at times in our life, will be paralyzed in some way or another...I don't mean physical paralysis. There are many other ways to be paralyzed...unable to move in some other way. ...You may have come here today struggling with a big decision, but unable to make that decision because you're afraid of making the wrong choice...Maybe your paralysis is an inability to forgive that person who hurt you so deeply...Maybe you find yourself speechless, not knowing how to defend your beliefs when you are ridiculed or criticized for being pro-life... Maybe your paralysis is a habit or an addiction that is keeping you from becoming all you could be...It could be you're stuck in an abusive relationship and you don't know to make the move to get free.... ...Maybe you are a captive to guilt, ...paralyzed by the idea that you can never overcome the wrongs you have done in the past... Maybe the pain of losing someone you loved is keeping you from moving on with your life. ...There are so many ways we may be like the paralytic in our Gospel...unable to move...unable to change our situation without help.

But, like that paralytic,...if we come here in faith...to this place... because we believe Jesus is here...Jesus IS IN THE HOUSE,...and if we listen to the words of the Gospel...and listen as the preacher connects the Gospel to our lives...if we really listen, we will hear Jesus speak to us...Oh yes, the preacher may not be very dynamic or very eloquent...but if we listen with an open heart, there will be a message from Jesus...It won't be the same for everyone...Each of us will hear the message Jesus wants us to hear...Very often, after I have preached a homily, someone will come up after Mass and tell me they felt that I had spoken directly to them, ...that my message was meant for them,...and I tell them, "No, you're wrong. It was Jesus who spoke to you. ...It was His message that you heard."...They are His words: comforting,... encouraging, ...forgiving,...challenging,...strengthening words...that will tell us what we need to do to.

And when we come to receive the Bread & the Wine and we say "Amen," because we believe it is Jesus Christ,...we believe that it is His Body & Blood,...then He will come to us,... become part of us...He will give us His strength....His courage ...His total trust in God the Father - all that we need - to free ourselves from whatever is paralyzing us...whatever is keeping us from the full & abundant Life He wants for us.

....At the end of our Gospel, Jesus says to the paralytic, "Get up, take up your mat & go home." He got up, took up his mat & walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone & they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"...Great things happened in that house that day.

My friends, Jesus is here in THIS house!...When we come here in faith...open to the ways He can guide us, touch us, change us,...great things can happen here too...Great things happen when Jesus is in the house! AMEN!