

Homily – Pickup your stretcher and walk, Mark 2: 1-12

Today's gospel story is amazingly rich in the messages and encouragement that it offers us. It starts off with these four wonderful friends bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus. So committed are they to get help for their friend, they climb up on the house, pull apart the roof, and then lower their friend down, into the presence of Jesus. What good friends to have! Jesus sees their faith, and is no doubt delighted. He then tells the paralysed man that his sins are forgiven. I must admit it sounds strange response, but Jesus knows what this man needs. Indeed, the gospel text reminds us that Jesus is inwardly aware of what people were thinking. (As Jesus is aware of what we are thinking!) Jesus knows what he needed and he knows what we need. In another twist to the story we see the ongoing struggle of Jesus with the scribes, who are preoccupied with matters of authority. He demonstrates to them that compassionate action should take precedence over blind adherence to rules. But in any case Jesus tells the man: “Get up, pick up your stretcher, and walk”. And of course, he does and everyone is astounded and gives praise to God.

There are many angles to this story that we could explore, but I would like to focus on just one of them. *The power of forgiveness.* In this story we hear that there is a particular connection between forgiveness and healing. It may even have been possible that the physical condition that the paralyzed man was in, had been contributed to in some way by burdens of guilt or sin that he was carrying.

As a chaplain, I meet many people who are not well emotionally or physically, and I often hear the burdens that they carry of anger, resentment, or guilt. Quite often it is the mental attitudes they have to their situation that contributes to them getting depression or anxiety or physical lethargy. I often feel like telling them directly, like Jesus, “Get up, Pickup your stretcher and walk”.

But physical healing may not be able to be achieved, until there is some mental or emotional healing. It may be that the person needs to know that they can be forgiven, or are forgiven, or to know that they can set themselves free by forgiving others. Or it may be that they need to know that they are loved and lovable. They made may need to know that they have a friend in us who will help them. But the real point I want to share is that it's the attitude that they have of their situation, that needs to be changed to avoid further health problems.

Many problems in life from the personal, right up to national and international levels could be handled better through the power of forgiveness.

Forgiveness operates positively both on the person aggrieved and the person who has contributed to wrongdoing.

I have seen this work amazingly in the life of Jose Ramos Horta, the President of Timor Leste. Some people would have read this article in this week's *Australian*. Four years ago last Wednesday, Jose was shot and seriously wounded in an assassination attempt on his life. Subsequently he moved to forgive and pardon his attackers, in an extraordinary act of forgiveness and charity. Of course he had already shown this same attitude in promoting reconciliation with Indonesia, after the 24 years of suffering that its military and police inflicted on his people, including the murder of 3 of his siblings.

The article in the Australian quotes him as saying ; Let us not forget the victims and heroes , but *let us forgive those who have done us harm* , because God has given us an even greater gift .

This stance is controversial in Timor because many people are still hurting and want revenge. They don't seem to realize that their attitudes are not helpful. Indeed they are not healthy and outright destructive as they sometimes continue the violence that has been inflicted on them, by lashing out and even hurting those they love. Jose has every reason to be hurting as well. He even has a bullet fragment still inside his body. But he has freed himself of the emotional bondage of revenge and anger, to direct his energies in promoting peace and reconciliation. What a wonderful example for all of us.

We all can be agents of healing and peace and reconciliation in our own families by adopting an attitude of forgiveness. But it may be that like the paralytic, that we need to be forgiven first. We all need to be right with God and there is no better way than through the sacrament of reconciliation. Can I commend this to you in the coming season of Lent . Having been unburdened by being forgiven ourselves, we can be energized to bring others to healing through our presence with them and through encouraging them to seek the healing of Jesus . How good would it be if each one of us could welcome one person to come and join us this Easter. Lets hope we could have the passion and determination of those friends of the paralysed man, to bring our friends into the presence of Jesus.

Forgiveness does not preclude justice. Justice is also part of Gods design for us. Those that have done wrong to God and others should have some penance and consequence for their actions and undertake some corrective and restorative justice. We have societal mechanisms in place to administer justice, better than us individually .

But forgiveness can be a real ministry to ourselves. By forgiving we let go of the desire for personal revenge, and we can come to see people as God sees them - not through eyes of hate but through eyes of love. That will bring us healing and health , whereas lack of forgiveness can be like a cancer that grows and cripples us and wounds our soul.

As we pray the Lords prayer today let us be sincere in praying , “Forgive us our trespasses , as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

Let us thank God that he desires to forgive us . Let us rejoice, as Isaiah and the psalmist remind us, that God desires to blot out our sins and make a new road in the wilderness for us. That road leads to freedom and liberation and health , through the power of forgiveness.