



HEALING MINISTRY by Father Robbie Low
Talk 1

Mark Chapter 2

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

I am starting with this visually stunning miracle because it combines the central teaching of the Faith on this ministry AND a very practical image of how we may go about it. These guys literally raise the roof in pursuit of the wellbeing of their friend. We may be a little hesitant to go to such extremes, nervous about promising too much, nervous about our failure as pray-ers, nervous about God's ability to deliver etc etc.

Does God even hear our prayers – so many millions besieging Him with their needs. How can He possibly deal with all this?

These are the very real and childlike questions that often form the backdrop to our hesitancy on Healing Ministry. We may well be poor pray-ers. The key question is, Are we persistent, focused, intentioned pray-ers. I would happily pray for an hundred people if I knew that even one would be healed or saved. We may doubt our own ability but we should not doubt God's. We see Him at work in Jesus and the results are amazing. If we wonder sometimes how God might hear and answer the colossal volume of faithful prayer just try an experiment when you get home. Tap the word 'Jesus' into your search engine when you get home. Within .7 of a second you will have nearly four billion connections. Within 1.5 seconds there would be 8 billion – one for every person on the earth. If the mere human configuration of electrical impulses can do that then imagine the power of the infinite God to connect. We need not fear that our prayer will go unheard.

The friends in the story have no doubt that their prayer will be heard. How it will be answered will become apparent shortly. There are a huge number of obstacles in their way and, oh boy, are they creative in tackling them. They are certainly thinking outside the box. Their sole aim is somehow to lay their friend at the feet of Jesus. And this, of course, is the key to healing ministry prayer.

We are not the healers, Christ is. Our task is to get our friend to the feet of Jesus I find that using this image in prayer helps me focus on what I am doing.

Then there are the obstacles. People often get in the way – not necessarily deliberately but nonetheless they do. We have to find ways of circumventing human obstruction. Sometimes that human obstruction is an uncooperative relative. Sometimes it's just our own hesitation or fear of embarrassment. Imagine taking the roof off and nothing happens. So we need to believe that Jesus can and will respond to our prayers.

Next we need to note that this is a work of friends. Together we bring the physically and spiritually wounded to Jesus. It's a joint effort. We use the liturgy of the Mass for our intercessions but we also pray privately AND, where healing

ministry is most effective we establish a prayer chain. This is other pray-ers whom one can contact and ask for their assistance in laying the sick at the feet of Christ. Notice that the man does not have the ability to get himself to Jesus. While this is a physical limitation in this story, we will know many cases where the sheer longevity and pain of suffering exhausts and disables the spirit of the sick and they rely on our 'carrying' prayers.

Then, having achieved the seemingly impossible, listen to Jesus' response. We, the pallet- bearers, have gone to extraordinary lengths to get our friend to Jesus so that He can heal him. What does Jesus say?

'Son your sins are forgiven.' WHAAAAAAAAAT?

In ancient times sin was inevitably associated with sickness. And we know full well that sin can be more disabling than visible infirmity. But that is not really the central point here. Jesus' priority is not to give the man his legs back but to give him his life back. His primary healing is his relationship with God. The great therapy that Jesus offers is in the ministry of reconciliation. The great healing hub of any church is the confessional. Jesus knows, as we do, that any physical healing is temporary – it will not stave off mortality. Lazarus will die again as will the son of the widow of Nain. We are mortal. What will not be undone is the power of Christ's forgiveness – this is what will, in the end, transform our mortality into his eternity.

In offering forgiveness, Jesus states clearly that He is God. Who else can thus forgive, heal, reconcile? In offering the forgiveness to the supplicant, The Church represents this ministry of Christ and dares to operate under His divine mandate. But this is not the end of the story. Priority established, Jesus then addresses the physical – but not as an end in itself but as a confirmation of the spiritual truth of divine absolution. Freed spiritually, the man is now given back his physical ability. That is the order of things in this exemplary miracle.

It is also the order in the Letter of St James in his instructions on Christian healing (ch.5). Confession and prayer and anointing and healing go together.

This miracle reminds us of the need to work together, to go, if necessary, to extraordinary lengths, to let no obstacle stand in our way as we struggle to bring our wounded friend to the feet of Jesus, to the place of eternal and ultimate healing, to the restoration of Man.

Our priority is to lay our friends at the feet of Jesus.

And that is what we are going to do now.

As we move round our circle of prayer each person is going to offer someone to pray for. In our minds and hearts we are going to place that person on the pallet of prayer and lay them at the feet of Jesus.

'I carry X on my heart and in my arms on the pallet of prayer and lay them at the feet of Jesus for His mercy and healing love.'