

Homily for 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

What a spectacle! Jesus in the midst of a home, overflowing crowds straining to hear him, four friends carrying a paralytic hoping for a cure and forced to climb to the rooftop to “create an opening” and finally a group of scribes who, as always, were there to criticize Christ.

But something bothers me. Why didn't the crowd open up and let the four men carrying the paralytic just walk through? Why did they have to tear open the roof? There are a lot of things at play here.

To begin with, sickness and sinfulness went hand-in-hand. Sickness was seen as punishment for one's sins. A trace of that is still around. How often has someone said: “What have I done to deserve this?” in response to a serious diagnosis. In ancient Israel it was a cottage industry. Perhaps the lack of courtesy from the crowd came from the belief that the man wasn't so much sick as he was sinful.

It was an industry because if sinfulness was the cause of illness, then eradicating the sin, experiencing forgiveness in some form, would be the correct treatment. For the sick, many of whom had little or nothing, the only recourse was the temple where they could remedy their sin....but at a cost. Forgiveness wasn't free. And those who sought it had to forfeit what funds they had in order to “buy” forgiveness and hopefully find

healing. This false and sad relationship between sin and suffering was taught by the scribes and Pharisees who only served to gain from the offering that people would make to achieve forgiveness.

When you think about it this story is a reflection of the relationship between an individual and the surrounding society. Some avoid the sick for they must be sinners, while others find a profit from the weaknesses of others. What needs healing is not just the individual but the society.

The problem still lingers today. A teenage girl suffers from an eating disorder. Is this her fault or the fault of a society that celebrates a distorted female image and spends billions in trying to achieve that image reflected in models and actors who look no better than a swizzle stick?

Even sadder, look at the increased number of young teenagers who take their own lives in response to being bullied and ostracized for their sexual orientation. Where is the sickness? To whom belongs the sin?

In the Gospel today Christ tolerates none of this. Jesus goes beyond the prejudice and judgment of the world in which He lived in order to reveal the tender compassion of God who came to forgive and to heal and to call His listeners to abandon judgment on others by celebrating God's mercy in each one of our lives.

At the end of the Gospel the paralytic gets up, picks up his (perhaps her) mat and walks out. We are given no indication of his reaction. We don't know what, if anything, he said. All we know is that the paralytic became the poster child for the human capacity to tap into the forgiving and healing power of God which is not bought but which is freely given out of love for each and every one of us.