

Sunday of week 7 of Ordinary Time

Commentary

on Isaiah 43:18-19,21-22,24-25; 2 Corinthians 1:18-22; Mark 2:1-12

LAST SUNDAY, after the healing of the leper, we saw Jesus fleeing to a remote place to get away from the excited crowds. They were looking for him but, it is implied, for the wrong reasons.

Today we see him returning to the town of Capernaum, which seems to have been his major base in Galilee. He is hardly in the town before the word gets round that he is back. Immediately the crowds gather in and around the house where he is staying. Is this unnamed house the home of Peter and Andrew? Or is it also a symbol of the Church, the place where Christ and his followers are to be found? In any case, it is so crowded that there is no room to get in or out. The people are all eager to hear what he is saying, for “no man spoke like this man” and he spoke, not like the Scribes, but “as one having authority”. (If our churches these days are not very crowded, is it because people do not find in them the life-giving Saviour they seek and need?)

A measure of faith

At that point, four men carrying a paralytic friend are anxious to get to Jesus. Seeing no way in, they go up by the outside staircase of the house on to the flat roof, remove a few tiles and let the man down right at the feet of Jesus. Jesus is touched by their determination which is a measure of their faith, trust and confidence in him. As we shall see in future stories, it is one of the conditions for healing.

Jesus says, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” This is a surprising statement. The man came for healing of his physical disability, not forgiveness. But in the way Jesus sees things, there can be no healing of the body without the inner healing of the soul. Healing means making whole again.

At the same time, the scribes present are shocked and say to themselves, “The man is blaspheming. Only God can forgive sins.” It was believed that not even the Messiah would have the power to forgive sin so the implications of Jesus’ statement are startling and shocking and their conclusion that only God can forgive sin is right on the button. But their eyes are closed to the logic of their own remark. They refuse to draw the obvious conclusion; they don’t see because they do not want to see.

Which is easier?

Jesus then challenges them. “Which is easier to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or ‘Get up, pick up your bed and walk’?” In a sense, either would be difficult for an ordinary person to pronounce with confidence. On the other hand, it is easy enough to say ‘Your sins are forgiven’. Who would know whether it had or had not happened? Then Jesus, justifying

what he has just said, first addresses his critics (“to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”) and then turns to the sick man, “Rise, pick up your mat and go home.” At once the man picked up his sleeping mat and walked out in front of everyone. The crowd is amazed. “We have never seen anything like this!”