



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This week's Gospel is a profound and moving example of our Lord's love and forgiveness, and the hardness of man's heart.

We begin exactly where we ended last week: after our Lord healed the Gergesene demoniacs and heeded the begging of the townspeople to leave them: *"At that time, getting into a boat Jesus crossed over and came to his own city"* (Matthew 9:1). However, if we expected that He would be treated with more kindness in Nazareth, we will quickly see that is not the case.

He first encounters a Paralytic, who is brought to Him by the man's neighbors. Moved by their love, Jesus says, *"Take heart my son, your sins are forgiven"* (Matthew 9:2). Naturally, this causes a scandal, for among the crowd are Scribes, who think to themselves, *"This man is blaspheming!"* (Matthew 9:3) Christ of course, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, knows the hardness of their hearts, and

so He asks, aloud, *"Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk' But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic— "Rise, take up your bed and go home"* (Matthew 9:4-6). The Paralytic then rises and goes home, leaving the crowd astonished and frightened, even as they *"...glorified God, who had given such authority to men"* (Matthew 9:8)

This reading asks us to seriously consider which of these groups we are to become. Are we like those Scribes whose judgmental minds cloud their hearts' understanding of God? Are we instead like those faithful neighbors, who love their friend, and respect the Son of David enough to seek His blessing and healing? These people demonstrate the very same spiritual counsel St. Paul would later give to the Romans in this week's fitting Epistle: *"...love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers"* (Romans 12:10-13).

This is the reason we have the Church as both an institution, and as the Body of Christ. The Church guides us towards closeness with God, helping us to keep His Word, glorifying Him through our thoughts and deeds, as did the people of Nazareth. I pray that we all receive inspiration from Above, health of soul and body, as well as the wisdom to not only assist our family and friends, but also to guard our own hearts.

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