

Terry and Fred Quinn

Homily

2/22/09

Mark 2 1-12

Forgiveness

Jesus has begun his mission. He has called several followers to help him with his mission,--- to spread the word. He has spoken to various groups and shown such compassion and acceptance to those who were outcasts or sick—so much so--- that his fame has spread and his reputation as a healer has begun. But he is more than a healer of bodies—he is a healer of the spirit,-- of the inner person.

This brings us to the interesting scene we witness in today's gospel. Jesus has become so popular in so short a time that it was hard to get to see him. It's something like the crowds that wait for hours to get into a sporting event, or a huge sale, or the inauguration of a certain President. Maybe the people around Capharnaum could teach us modern-day folk a thing or two, because they thought of a way to get in to see Jesus---why just break through the roof and literally "drop in." Talk about creativity! Jesus must have been impressed with this ingenuity. It led him to say to the paralytic who was set before him after his auspicious drop-in—What's easier to say "Get up and walk or your sins are forgiven." Neither is easy to say, but we sense that Jesus was referring to more than physical paralysis.

Let's stop for a moment to recall that at the time of Jesus--- illness, and even injury were thought to be punishments for some misdeed or lapse in following some rule. Let's also reflect on the fact that Jesus shaped his message in metaphorical language to challenge thinking and then invite a relevant and deeper understanding of what he was trying to get across. So the paralysis which confronted Jesus in the man before him, and perhaps in the crowd around him, was the inability to recognize forgiveness. Jesus speaks to us of the paralysis of not knowing that we are truly forgiven and not only do we need to forgive others, but that we need to recognize that we are paralyzed by our own inability to forgive ourselves. Are there feelings within us, memories perhaps, that we cannot free ourselves from-----small or big things that we cannot let go of? Are

we paralyzed by our inability to really believe that what IS God is the essence of forgiveness, of acceptance and therefore healing.

And now for a tale of wisdom:-- a Greek myth about Mt. Olympus, which emphasizes the great value of true love and compassion toward others in even the most humble of circumstances. It is usually told to point out how the love and commitment of 2 people endure and affect those around them and their environment. Today I would like to point out another metaphor I see in this story that refers to the metaphor in today's gospel story.

One morning Zeus and Hermes descended from the cloud-shrouded peak of Mt. Olympus and traveled the countryside, disguised as ragged beggars. A long dusty cloak covered Zeus's radiance as king of the gods. Hermes's high, wide boots covered his winged sandals, for he was the swift messenger of the gods. "Let us wander from door to door," Zeus said, "We will discover how mortals treat strangers in need."

Hermes knocked at the door of the first house they came upon. "Good morning, sir" he said humbly, "we are hungry and tired. Please give us your hospitality."

"Here's my hospitality," shouted the man who answered the door with a long broom in hand. "I will sweep you away." He swung the broom and, scattering dust sent the two beggars scampering off his doorstep.

"Well," shrugged Zeus, "we shall try elsewhere."

But the people in the next house were just as unpleasant. "Begone, flea-bitten beggars," they shouted.

House by house the two gods traveled the countryside. Everywhere the people turned them away. At last they came to a small hut of an elderly couple, Baucus and Philemon. The two had been married as long as they could remember and were as coupled as a pair of hands. One would begin a sentence and the other would finish it. Their hearts beat as one.

As they sat at their table, just about to begin a simple meal of bread and water, they heard a knock at the door. "I'll answer it," Baucus said.

"No I'll get it," said Philemon. So they both rose to open the door. That is how they did everything. The two opened the door and before them stood the two gods, dressed as beggars. "Please", Zeus said meekly, "we are tired and hungry. May we come in and share your meal and fireside?"

"Certainly," said Baucus and Philemon together. "We don't have much, but what we have is yours. We can offer you only bread and water, but it is the best we have."

Baucis shoed a tired old cat off one chair. Philemon shoed a skinny chicken off the edge of another chair. Together they pulled the extra seats to the table. Two more cracked plates were added to the setting, along with glasses for the water that stood cold in a tall pitcher.

Zeus and Hermes sat at the table and Baucus cut each a slice of bread. As she poured the water into the glasses, her hand started to tremble. Instead of water, ruby red wine flowed into the glass. Philemon gasped. It was as if the same thought gripped the two like a giant hand. They realized that the beggars were not mere mortals. They fell to their knees before the gods and begged for forgiveness.

“We will kill the old chicken! Allow us to make amends. We are unworthy. We have served the immortals food that is too simple.

Baucis and Philemon leapt to their feet and started to chase the skinny old chicken around the kitchen. Zeus and Hermes through off their dusty cloaks and dazzling light filled the room. The two old ones squinted in the glare.

Zeus shouted, “Stop. Let the chicken live. You have clearly demonstrated your kind generosity.

Zeus gathered the two old people in his arms and reassured them, When you have truly given the best you can offer, there is never a need to apologize.”

When Baucis and Philemon looked at the table the bread had turned into the finest meal they ever saw.

“For your kindness,” said Zeus, “I would like to reward you with a wish.”

Baucis and Philomon wound their arms around each other, and in one breath said, “ We wish to be together always. When we die, let us die at the same moment so that neither of us will suffer the pain of separation.”

“So be it,” said Zeus. In a moment, he and Hermes disappeared, leaving the old ones to enjoy a fine meal and each other’s company.

In the morning, a great temple appeared where their house had been. The two tended the temple until the moment they breathed their last breath together and died. Baucis and Philemon were buried side by side in front of the temple.

Because they gave the best they had to offer, their wish to stay together came true. From their graves grew two trees, a huge oak and a large linden. The trees grew toward each other until at last their branches entwine and gave shade to all who rested beneath them.

Perhaps the metaphor that we can also learn from this story is that there are no gods who decide whether we are worthy of forgiveness. The essence of forgiveness is powerful, is freely given by the healing spirit within all of us and within the cosmos and we should never be constrained by the paralysis of fear or feelings of unworthiness.

**I repeat the words of Isaiah:
No Need to recall the past,
No need to think about what was done before,
See, I am doing as new deed,
Even now it comes to light, can you not see it?**