



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



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February 22, 2009

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

Reading 1                    Is 43:18-19, 21-22, 24b-25

Thus says the LORD:  
Remember not the events of the past,  
the things of long ago consider not;  
see, I am doing something new!  
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
In the desert I make a way,  
in the wasteland, rivers.  
The people I formed for myself,  
that they might announce my praise.  
Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob,  
for you grew weary of me, O Israel.  
You burdened me with your sins,  
and wearied me with your crimes.  
It is I, I, who wipe out,  
for my own sake, your offenses;  
your sins I remember no more.

Responsorial Psalm                    Ps 41:2-3, 4-5, 13-14

- R. (5b) Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.  
Blessed is the one who has regard for the lowly and the poor;  
in the day of misfortune the LORD will deliver him.  
The LORD will keep and preserve him;  
and make him blessed on earth,  
and not give him over to the will of his enemies.
- R. Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.  
The LORD will help him on his sickbed,  
he will take away all his ailment when he is ill.  
Once I said, "O LORD, have pity on me;  
heal me, though I have sinned against you."
- R. Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.  
But because of my integrity you sustain me  
and let me stand before you forever.  
Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,  
from all eternity. Amen. Amen.
- R. Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.



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Reading II    2 Cor 1:18-22

Brothers and sisters:  
As God is faithful,  
our word to you is not "yes" and "no."  
For the Son of God, Jesus Christ,  
who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me,  
was not "yes" and "no," but "yes" has been in him.  
For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him;  
therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory.  
But the one who gives us security with you in Christ  
and who anointed us is God;  
he has also put his seal upon us  
and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

Gospel        Mk 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days,  
it became known that he was at home.  
Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them,  
not even around the door,  
and he preached the word to them.  
They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.  
Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd,  
they opened up the roof above him.  
After they had broken through,  
they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying.  
When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,  
"Child, your sins are forgiven."  
Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves,  
"Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming.  
Who but God alone can forgive sins?"  
Jesus immediately knew in his mind  
what they were thinking to themselves,  
so he said, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?  
Which is easier, to say to the paralytic,  
'Your sins are forgiven,'  
or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk?'  
But that you may know  
that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth"  
—he said to the paralytic,



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"I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."  
He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone.  
They were all astounded  
and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

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On this Sunday before Lent begins, the scripture readings send us a powerful message about our compromised condition in this world.

In the Gospel of Mark we hear the story of the paralyzed man, who could not get near Jesus because of the crowd. Jesus would not even know he was out there. Whether it was the man's idea or that of his friends, they remove part of the roof, carry him up to the roof and lower him down in front of Jesus.

Jesus knew just what to do. He had his priorities straight. Speaking past the paralyzed man directly to us, Jesus says "Your sins are forgiven."

There's a lot that's left unsaid at this point. If the motivation for the man to see Jesus was to be healed, we'd expect him to have said something like "Thank you Jesus, but that's not what I came here for. Can't you heal me?"

But apparently he didn't say that. Jesus had healed something more important than his limbs. The man was content to be forgiven and to listen to Jesus.

It is the scribes who complain, and whose complaint moves Jesus to heal the man's body to show the source of His power.

The message I see in this story is that "We are the paralyzed man."

We suffer at the very least from the paralysis of analysis, a very human condition, the condition of beings gifted with the ability to both reason and rationalize. We do this with our economic condition, with our environment, with our politics and with our faith.

What if I hadn't done that? What if I had known then what I know now? What if I hadn't chosen the path I did? If I made such a mistake then, how do I know I won't repeat it now? I thought I was right then, am I right now? How far can I go before it is a sin? It is so easy to analyze, isn't it.

Having to know the future and replaying the past, surveying our lives for borders so we can build walls, can be paralyzing for our present, can affect our relationships and our attempts at love and friendships, even with God.

Paralysis comes in all forms and the most debilitating are the ones that lock up our spirits and limit our hope for change.

The paralysis of analysis. We have so much data in fact it's hard to keep up with the new information as it appears. When do we have enough or all the pertinent data with which to make a decision or to commit ourselves? After all we wouldn't want to be wrong, to make a mistake. So we so often hedge our bets, wait and see. We often fail to act, and don't do this thing or that thing for pragmatic reasons.



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We Christians are a disadvantage compared to our predecessors in Salvation History and to some of those in other faiths. Moses, Joshua, David even Muhammad were heads of state. The societies they governed were theocracies with revealed rules that covered almost every situation in life. God's expectations of His people, society and the state were clear.

It is no longer like that. No more. We must decide...and answer that stereotypical but valid question: What would Jesus do ? He had his priorities; We surely have ours, but are they His ?

The scripture tells us: Now is the day of Salvation. We cannot delay. We must act. We cannot remain the paralyzed man.

That man in the Gospel and his friends took positive action. They came to Jesus and were persistent and innovative. And God rewarded their initiative.

God surely takes 10 steps toward us for every one we take toward Him; He comes out to meet us, as the father did the prodigal son and gives us more than we ask, if we only just come toward Him. If we'll climb up to the roof, he take us all the way to heaven.

But for us it is so difficult to so sincerely and humbly approach God. After all, He'll expect us to change, to repent, as we say. So we tend to delay, wait till we have all the data, wait until the time is right, rather like the Emperor Constantine, who waited until he was on his deathbed to be baptized.

Unlike the paralyzed man who was desperate to get to Jesus, we are not quite desperate, and we don't feel the numbness our hesitation causes creeping through our spiritual limbs.

When I was thinking about and still resisting a vocation, the young priest in my parish told a story of when he was a very young child, how he climbed far up into the old tree in his back yard. When he got as far up as he could go, he looked down and was terrified. How would, how could he get back down ? He could not, would not climb down. He cried and his father came out. His father stood underneath him and said "Let go...I'll catch you."

That idea was not very appealing either; he might hit some branches on the way down. His father might miss, and he'd break a bone. The longer he hesitated, the more problems he foresaw with jumping ,but the more terrified he became. Finally he just had to act. He knew he couldn't trust himself to get down alone & he also knew he trusted his father, so he said yes and he jumped. His father caught him and they both lived to tell about it. I too survived my jump.



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We too must take the real leap of faith, not analyze ourselves into paralysis. We must say and be about “Yes yes” as Saint Paul tells the Corinthians. Yes to God, who tells us through the Prophet Isaiah “I am doing something new.” We must say yes to God’s presence and demands in our lives, say yes to what God is doing in the world.

Father Laurence gave a homily recently quoting Mephistopheles in Goethe’s Faust, who tells us...

Satan is the spirit that always says no, always objects, always negates.

In that same work Goethe puts into the mouth of God words that are so apt for our time and our paralysis:

*Of all the spirits of denial  
The joker is the last that I eschew.  
Man finds relaxation too attractive--  
Too fond too soon of unconditional rest;*

We must say yes to the will of God, to the new things He is doing. This is surely hard to do in personal trials, such as afflicted Job and whom Satan tempted to curse God. Our eyes are not capable of seeing God’s plans laid out before us, And He owes us no explanation beyond His assurance that He will prevail and that we will rise to eternal happiness with Him....if we say “yes” and live our yes.

Surely we must say no to somethings, to evil. But what and which ? To know requires that “yes” whereby we can listen to and be docile to the Holy Spirit, the first installment of salvation.

Our No’s so often get in the way, and paralyze or faith and our church. There is much bifurcation in the church:

- Many say Yes to moral imperatives – No to Sunday Mass.
- Many say Yes to the Creed – No to *Humanae Vitae*.
- Many say Yes to dogma – No to social teachings.
- Many say Yes to the sanctity unborn life – No to the dignity of criminals lives, the needs of the poor, of immigrants, the homeless, all those who have been born into a living hell.
- Many yes to responsible stewardship of the church - No to responsible stewardship of the planet.

If we are honest with ourselves, we all have a few “No’s” in our pocket, which paralyze us.

God is not only doing something new, as Isaiah says, but as God himself says in the final book of the Bible... “Behold I make all things new.” That includes us, but it means we have to change.



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Lent is coming, a time to repent and say yes, a time for healing and wholeness.

Jesus told the paralyzed man "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."

We belong to the Church so that we can help each other get ourselves and our mats up to the roof. Our presence here together at the Eucharist is a big step we are taking upward toward our Father. Lets empty our pockets and just say yes all the way home.