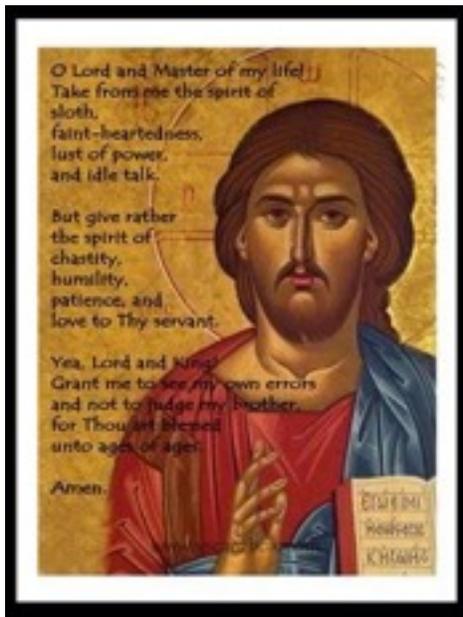


**FATHER ANTON'S WORDS OF WISDOM:** When reading the scriptures one can't help but wonder what it would have been like to live in the time of Jesus and to listen to him in person.



Witnessing his message and acts must have moved the hearts of the people who came into contact with him – yet even with his presence there was still many who doubted. Faith is a funny thing at times. When our lives are going along well our faith is strong and it's easy to believe in God and to trust in his love, but when things start to go wrong often one of our immediate responses is doubt. In our desperation we cry out to God and it would seem that he isn't listening, yet all the while when we are looking so hard for him, he is carrying us; but we are blinded by our situation. Today's gospel illustrates to us the faith not only of the man who was paralyzed, but also the faith of his friends who lowered him down through the roof at the feet of Jesus. It was this faith that Jesus responded to – the miracle was the paralyzed man's trust in Jesus who he knew could help him – why did Jesus say "Your sins are forgiven?" It's really quite simple.

Remember that in Jesus day illness and suffering were believed to be a punishment from God, and he would later change this way of thinking through his teachings. He would have to work hard even on his own apostles who had trouble changing the way they had been taught to think about God. It's a Sabbath, and the scribes who were all about the "law" chastise Jesus because he offers forgiveness. They accuse of him of blasphemy because according to the law only God alone could forgive sins. Jesus well aware of their thoughts challenges them and then does something that shakes them to their very core... he frees the man from his paralyses and the man leaves thanking God for his freedom. Have you ever felt paralyzed in your life? You know, those times when life just seems to grip you so hard that you don't know where to turn. Everything seems to be happening so quickly that you can't even think straight –you are in effect... paralyzed. Life seems to have come to a standstill and although you believe in God's love for you, you begin to think "God must be punishing me for something that I'm not aware of." This has got to be the lowest point in the life of any human being, and certainly completely hopeless without an element of faith.

Our belief and trust in God won't always change our circumstances, but it gives us something even more important. Our faith gives us hope and a different perspective on human suffering. If we read the New Testament we soon come to understand and witness not just the divinity of Jesus – but also his humanity. The divine dwells in human flesh and learns by his own experience the joys, and sorrows of his children as well as what it means to suffer and persevere through faith. One of the most human moments in the life of Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane where he kneels and prays to his father. His prayer is a human cry, and one that we are not unfamiliar with in our own lives: "Father, if you can do anything to prevent my suffering, I ask that you do, however not my will but yours be done." At face value it would seem that God would "will" that we suffer – however this is not the case. God does not "will"

that someone suffer from cancer, or lose their life in a car accident. Nor is it his desire that we lose a child, or have to say goodbye to those we love because of violence. These are all part of our human condition, and the crucifixion is witness to this. It wasn't God who drove the nails into the hands and feet of Jesus – he could have intervened if he wanted to, but there was a greater lesson to be learned. In times of trial and times of suffering perseverance always bears fruit. In the case of Jesus it was the promise of new life for you and me. We know that death is not an end but a new beginning... life has not ended is has changed. God's love is beyond our own capability of understanding. In the person of Jesus we witness a God who is always giving. Jesus was always challenging the status quo and teaching the people a different way to relate to God. No longer would they have to be paralyzed by fear, they were freed by love. Jesus tried to help them understand that their relationship with God was as a child to their father. God was interested in them. He cared about their lives and understood their weaknesses. He wanted them to feel secure in his love and to trust in his providence. He would provide for their needs if they were willing to cooperate. For any relationship to succeed it takes communication and cooperation between both parties. It is no different with our relationship with God. We need to keep the lines of communication open, and to nurture this love which is so freely given to us. We need to learn to live our lives in gratefulness and to share our love with each other. We are only paralyzed when we lose faith, and we lose faith when we stop communicating – Prayer is the key that opens the lock of every new day, and it is the key that locks us securely in the knowledge of God's love for us and the end of each day. For most of us we experience this love through friends and family who gather when life's road is rough to help us navigate the potholes and ruts, and they are with us to share in our joy. The key to a healthy faith and relationship with Jesus is to recognize his presence in them at every moment. The man in today's gospel was physically paralyzed, but in today's world we suffer from spiritual paralyses. We are a generation who want things to go our way, and when they don't we rebel. The secret to life is accepting each moment as it comes, knowing that God is with us. Those times when we feel he is far away, he is closest – he is carrying us, and enveloping us in his love. This second Sunday of Lent is a good time to ask ourselves about those things that are paralyzing us in our relationship with Jesus, and once recognized we too need to place ourselves at Jesus' feet. This is true faith – learning in our darkest and difficult moments to “let go, and let God.”

**Let us pray: Loving God, you sent Jesus into the world to restore our relationship with you. He taught us to journey from fear into love and there we would find you. Help me to recognize in my own life those times when I thought I was alone, yet you were there with me. May my Lenten journey be a constant awareness of your presence and may I rediscover the depth of your love. Amen.**