

Trinity XIX

Ephesians 4: 17-32 & Matthew 9: 1-8

October 6, 2024

One of the things that we face in the world is the rejection of God or anything related to God. We are witnessing what James White calls “the rise of the Nones,” which is the fastest-growing religious group in America today. They are religious in their way and they don’t affiliate with any traditional religious group. These are the people we call the “unchurched.”

They refuse to admit that, as John Newton wrote in “Amazing Grace,” ‘We are wretched’ and we need a Savior and a healer. They fail to acknowledge that they need God to survive and endure their situations.

Today’s gospel teaches us to find them and bring them to Jesus.

The paralyzed man met Jesus at his crucial point of need when he was brought to him by his friends. He was paralyzed because of sin. Sin forces us to live with guilt, shame, and constant fear. It binds us and hinders us from being able to express love.

We are unable to “walk” because of sin. WALK: another way of saying “surrender yourself to Jesus.”

And that’s how the Epistle and the gospel connect. The Epistle urges us “not to walk as other Gentiles Walk, in the vanity of their mind.” Some people, even Christians, and church members, walk in the vanity of their minds. They hold onto the things of this world. They think and act like the people of this world. They forget who they are in the face of some important decisions or choices to make. Look at the scribes of today’s gospel and pay close attention to their reaction to the healing of the man sick of palsy by Jesus. They murmured saying that Jesus blasphemed. There will always be people like that in our circles. They will criticize you for everything, even for things that they themselves are not able to accomplish. Busybodies! They are everywhere, even in the church! The problem is not why they exist; the problem is how we react to them. Our goal is to bring people to Jesus including those to hate us, who criticize us, who say all kinds of evil things about us. Don’t give up on them, they need help. They are sick and therefore need Jesus. And for them to really meet Jesus and get healed, we need to do two things.

1. We have to commit ourselves to the ministries of the church. We need to reach out to them. One sad thing, and it’s sad, that I have noticed with my over 40 years of ministry as a Dominican (Order of Preachers) is that the people who most need the healing power of the church are often the most reluctant to stay around and experience it. They will not come when or where they need it. The more wounded and fearful they are, the more

tempted they are to flee when other people get too close. That's just a fact. Closeness and genuine intimacy are what we really need, and we will not be fully healed until we experience it. We call this "the communion of the Saints."

2. We need to commit ourselves to loving each other within the church in a way that reflects the love of God. We have to learn to forgive and forbear one another in love. Here is how St Paul put it in **1 Thessalonians 5: 9-11**. We have to learn to think the best and not the worst of others. The people who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus thought the best of him. They wished and went the extra mile to find the best for him. We have to learn to be honest with each other. We have to learn to give people the room they need to work out their problems in the church with a balance of acceptance and accountability. We have to be our brothers and sisters' keepers.

The paralyzed man wouldn't have been healed without the presence and labor of his friends.

All well considered, the main point of the gospel and the epistle is this: we will not fully experience forgiveness from God unless we also experience it in relationship with other people. The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins. The church is called to be a new community of restored relationships in which people can experience that power and learn to "Rise and walk."

Prayer

O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.