



# SAINT SAVA PRO-CATHEDRAL SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

METROPOLITANATE OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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## THE SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT (Mark 2:1-12)

### The Sunday of the Paralytic

By practicing Christian values we are trying to have a Christ-like life and to direct ourselves to God. Above anything else, lent is an exercise in overcoming all the obstacles in order to come before the Physician of our souls and bodies – Jesus Christ. Today's Gospel teaches directly to this important point. This Bible story is about people's faith and their effort to cross all the barriers to be in front of Christ.

Wherever He was going, Christ was followed by a large crowd of people, but not because they were believers and they lived according to His Gospel, but because they were just curious. Later, most of these people would abandon Him, turn against Him, and even participate in the trial against Him. During His saving mission, Jesus's headquarters were in Capernaum. The people of Capernaum, always followed and listened to Jesus, even witnessed many of His miracles, but never accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and their Savior. Their hearts stayed cold, unable or unwilling to accept His saving Gospel. They had the opportunity to see and listen to the Son of God, and to witness so many miracles, but they refused to accept Him, thus they brought damnation upon themselves: "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." (Matthew 11:23-24).

**"And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately, many gathered together, so there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them."** The news that He came back to the house where He lived in Capernaum spread very fast. A large number of people gathered, so no one could come even near the house. **"Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic on a pallet to be healed".**

These four men were bringing their paralyzed friend on a pallet, hoping that Jesus would heal him. They couldn't enter the house because the curious crowd didn't want to move aside and let them through. If they didn't find a way to bring their friend before Jesus, he would stay paralyzed forever. What is the deeper meaning of this? The first obstacle on our path to Christ are people who are part of our lives.



Knowingly or unknowingly, they will sabotage our efforts to reach Christ. They will lay many arguments as to why we should not go to the Church: 'that is not necessary'; 'it's enough to be a good man'; 'you are not sick'; 'only sinners go to the church'; 'that's a waste of time'; 'there is no fun in the Church', and many, many other excuses. That could also happen through gossip or laughing behind our backs. They will do and say many things just to make us feel uncomfortable until we stop fighting for our eternal life. If we do not overcome this obstacle we will stay spiritually paralyzed, and never be able to reach Christ. If we renounce the Gospel because of people, Christ on His Day of Judgment will not accept us. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38).

**"And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying."** Instead of giving up, these four friends climbed on the roof. Through the roof they lowered the pallet with their friend in front of Jesus. Climbing on the roof, lifting their friend on a pallet, making the hole big enough for the pallet, lowering their friend....

all of these efforts were the result of their great faith in Christ. This is a lesson for all of us that faith is not about having positive thoughts about God, but rather that true faith requires man to start working for his salvation, primarily on himself first. The meaning of climbing to a height, in this case on a roof, is that we have to elevate our inner being above all worldly temptations, worries and problems. Instead of thinking about temporary things from this world, we should direct our mind towards God. Here it is important to notice, that while the roof above His head was being demolished, Jesus said nothing. One complaint from Jesus, and they would've come down from the roof. That did not happen because God wants every man to come near Him. Also, Jesus could've asked the crowd to move aside, or He could've come closer to them, but that did not happen either, because He wanted to show the faith of these four people to the unbelievers of Capernaum.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, **"Son, your sins are forgiven you."** The great faith of the paralytic is obvious. He is going through all these troubles because he believes that Jesus will cure him. Also, the people that carry him have visibly deep faith. We can clearly see the effort of this group of faithful people, or this community of faithful people, who care and carry one man to be healed. Because of their faith Jesus will heal the paralytic. This is a lesson about how much a prayer coming from a community of faithful people – the Church, can help someone in need.

Christ knows that this man is paralyzed, but the first thing He does is to forgive his sins, and after that to return his physical health. Why in that order? Because the purpose of Christ's coming into the world is to liberate every man from sin, and to reconnect him to our heavenly Father. At the same time Christ shows that for humans, sins are more dangerous than physical illness, because sins separate man from God, who is the only source of life and sin leads to eternal death. Through Adam's disobedience sin entered into this world, and death through sin: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12). But through the obedience of the New Adam – Jesus Christ, we receive justification: "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act, a free gift came to all men, resulting in the justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:18-19). Sometimes our sins can also be the source of physical illness and suffering in this world. Curing the sick man in Bethesda, Jesus had told him: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." (John 5:14). That which is far worse than an affliction of the body is eternal death.

**"And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"** The scribes know very well that God is the only one who can forgive sins. That is why in their hearts they see that as a blasphemy, and also because they do not recognize Jesus Christ as God. But God who can read their hearts and taught told them this: **"Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up the bed, and go to your house."** Immediately, he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of all of them, so they all were amazed and glorified God, saying, **"We never saw anything like this!"** Even the people witnessing this miracle didn't understand. But by forgiving the sins of the paralytic Jesus was doing the more difficult thing first. Because forgiving sins is possible only to God. For the people watching and listening to all this, forgiving sins seemed easier than healing the paralytic, because that is something you can't see. What would happen if Jesus healed the paralytic, and yet he could not arise from his pallet? That is exactly what the scribes wanted to happen: to expose Christ as a charlatan to the people. So, after forgiving his sins, Jesus also healed the physical illness of the paralytic, because the completely healthy man has to be both spiritually and physically healthy.

In this Gospel Jesus does three things only God can do. Firstly, He can read people's hearts, because He knows the thoughts of the scribes. Secondly, forgiving sins is the authority that belongs only to God, and He confirms that by His word. Thirdly, curing physical illness by His mighty word, is also what God does. Our Lord does all these things to show Himself as the true God – the Liberator of humanity from sin and death to the people of Capernaum and also to all of us.

It is up to us to work and to make efforts to come before Christ, and not to pay attention to people around us. Whatever is eternal in this world comes from God, not from people. Whoever is seeking for glory and honor from people, is unable to come closer to Christ: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:44 and 40). Our lord patiently waits with his open arms for every man to wake up and start working on his salvation. The worst possible option is to give up on our fight for our salvation, just because we put people and what they think **before** our love and devotion for God. That is how we cut off ourselves from the eternal life.