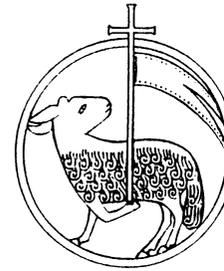


power for his Father has appointed his Son supreme judge. We accept his forgiveness then. Each sin is a little death, each restoration is a mini-resurrection and in time, sin is done to death. Then we can truly say that we already have eternal life.

And again, if we had really been cured of a physical paralysis, what would be our reaction? Would we not heap gratitude upon the performer of the cure and go round praising him or her to all and sundry. So we should do the same when we have been healed of a spiritual paralysis, thanking our Lord with profuse thanks and singing his praise. To thank God is to make eucharist (which is the Greek word for thanksgiving) and it is there in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper that all the strands are brought together; confession of sin and absolution, listening to God's word in scripture and sermon, remembrance of Christ's life, death and resurrection undergone for the redemption of the whole world, and our sharing in those events by sharing in the Body and Blood of our Lord; one glorious act of thanksgiving to God "for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory."

To sing God's praise to those with whom we come into contact - what is that but evangelism? If our evangelism is inspired by a real experience of being loosened from the bonds of sin we cannot help but be proclaimers of good news. Our lives will have such a quality of joy and thanksgiving overflowing into love for all creation that we will be 'attractive' : others will be drawn to Christ because they will see that he has done such great things for us.



FAITH *Praying and believing* ON THE EARTH

SPIRITUAL PARALYSIS

It is probable that most people at some time feel themselves unable to do something that they want to do, or that they ought to do. The inability may be due to temperament, circumstances, habitual sin, sloth, weariness or other factors. For some reason it is as if we have lost control of ourselves, as if we are gripped by a paralysis.

The story of the healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5: 1-16) can be read on several levels because a paralysis can be in the spiritual realm as well as the physical. The man has been lying there for years unable to move. "Do you want to be healed?" asks Jesus. Do we really want to be healed of our paralysing sins, since healing can be costly? When we are paralysed, in a way it is not our fault; a certain amount of responsibility has been taken from us and it can be quite challenging to be given back our freedom. It is much easier to stay as we are, avoiding effort. At the Pool of Bethesda the man slithers away from Jesus' question with the answer: "I have no man to put me in the water." By this statement he acknowledges that he cannot heal himself, he needs someone to help him. But "I have no man!" This echoes the cry of the psalmist in Psalm 142, "I had no place to flee unto, and no man careth for me."

Yet the Psalm continues, "I cried unto thee, O Lord and said: "Thou art my hope and my portion in the land of the living." And so we pray, even without much conviction, and our prayer is heard. Although Jesus lived and died in the flesh nearly 2,000 years ago, the Spirit of the living, risen and ascended Christ is still active and carries

on his healing and sanctifying work. He uses among other agents the members of his Body, the Church. We have all of us no doubt already had someone to put us in the water, at our baptism, and daily and monthly we are brought into living contact with our Lord himself, through the teaching and example of other Christians, through his Word in the scriptures and in prayer. Jesus wishes to do something in us and for us.

And so he says, "Take up your bed and walk." Sometimes we are so disheartened by our struggle against sin that we are tempted to give up trying. Our whole spiritual life can become paralysed. Because we can't win a victory in one particular instance we think it is not worth trying in any other area. The remedy is to do **something** and to do it because our Lord tells us to do it.

Jesus often seems to preface his healings by a command:- Stretch out your hand; Go and show yourselves to the priest; Go and wash; Go home, your son will live; Take up your bed and walk. This is a task for prayer, to discern what Jesus is asking of us. Sometimes it is something very small and insignificant, but obeying the command opens the door to the Holy Spirit. For the faith that he asks of us is just that act of trust and abandonment by which we rely no longer on our own strength or judgement but commit ourselves to the power and guiding word of him in whom we believe - and quite often when we obey the small command we find that the 'big' paralysis disappears.

An example of this in the Old Testament is the story of Naaman the Syrian who had leprosy (2 Kings 5: 1-14). On being sent to Elisha for healing, to his disgust Elisha didn't even come out of his house, but sent his servant to tell him to go and bathe seven times in the River Jordan. To come all that way only to be told to go and bathe in the Jordan! Were not the rivers of his own country as adequate if not more so? Luckily for him his servants had more wisdom and said to him, "If the prophet had told you to do something very

difficult you would have done it without arguing? All the more reason then to do as he tells you and bathe."

Naaman was humble enough to take their advice and so he was healed of his leprosy.

But healing doesn't cease with the restoration of health. That is only the beginning of the process. When Jews asked the man who had been cured who had healed him, he replied, "I do not know" for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that filled the place.

It is so easy to forget that it is the hand of God which delivers us from our sins and their effects. We pick up life again with all its distractions, so preoccupied with a crowd of cares, anxieties and other interests that Jesus is lost in them. When people ask us about our faith we do not know how to answer. Afterwards, however, Jesus finds the man in the Temple. If we enter the temple of our hearts in prayer Jesus will be found there, or rather he will find *us* there. Then we shall know how much we have to thank God for our redemption. When others ask us about our faith, "with reverence for the Lord in our hearts we will always have our answer ready for people who ask us the reason for the hope we all have." (I Peter 3:15).

We have already been put into the waters of baptism and because of that are no longer paralysed by sin, but this cure is a divine favour that must be acknowledged by continuing conversion; it is a sign of spiritual resurrection. "Whoever listens to my words and believes in the one who sent me **has** eternal life; without being brought to judgement he has passed from death to life." (John 6: 40). We are at the same time both saved and continually being saved. We continue to sin but know that sin no longer has the power to paralyse us providing we turn again and again to our Lord in repentance. And each time we do that he says "Your sins are forgiven; take up your bed and walk." "Neither do I condemn you; Now you are well again be sure not to sin any more." He says it with all authority and