

XIX TRINITY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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EPHESIANS 4.17 ST. MATTHEW 9.1



Tony Melendez...a young man born without arms...played the guitar for Pope (now Saint) John Paul II during his visit to Los Angeles.

It was September 15, 1987...the World watched as the visibly moved John Paul came down from his chair and embraced Tony. He called him a man of great courage...and wished for him to continue to give hope to all people.

John Paul II often told young people to be courageous...and not to be afraid...even when they encountered obstacles and hardships in life...to never give up hope.

Jesus was moved by the courage and faith of the friends of the paralyzed man in today's Gospel. He told the paralyzed man to be courageous...and then he said something remarkable...he forgave the man of his sins.

The Jews of Jesus' time believed the power to forgive sins belonged to God and to God alone. Jesus claims the power to forgive sins for himself. For the lawyers and teachers who were with him...this was an outrageous display of blasphemy.

Jesus knows what they are thinking and asks them why they are thinking such evil thoughts. He backs up his claim by healing the paralyzed man of his paralysis...and sends him on his way home.

In his commentary on today's Gospel in the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, Father Massey Shepherd writes...

"Today we know physical health and spiritual health are intimately bound together, and that there is often nothing more healing in its power than the relief and the release that come from a consciousness and acceptance of God's forgiveness."

Jews believed illness was a punishment from God for sin. When someone was cured...sin's power over that person was broken. Only a priest in the Temple could certify the person cured...although the priest had no power to make the person whole again.

What Jesus does in today's Gospel is heal the paralyzed man by making him both spiritually and physically whole. There is a connection between physical and spiritual healing.

Often when we don't feel well...our spiritual lives are not at their best either. We should remember what John Paul II said...and be courageous...and not be afraid...and never give up hope. Jesus is all about forgiveness and helping us repair and rebuild our lives.

Jesus commissioned the Apostles with the power to forgive sins in his Name. This power has been delegated to the priests of the Church...who follow in the Apostles teachings and practice. It is a duty conferred on a man when he is ordained priest...an obligation he must faithfully discharge with love and compassion.

Our friend Saint Paul also has something to say about forgiveness...he tells us to get rid of all bitterness and anger infecting our lives...and to replace them with the ideals of Christian behavior. We are to be kind and tender hearted to one another...and we are to forgive one another...just as God has forgiven us through Jesus.

We could wrongly conclude from Paul's words we should never get angry. Paul's concern and Jesus'...is that anger not control us to the point it turns to hatred. Paul tells us not to go to bed angry at someone...we all know the loss of sleep can lead to serious health problems.

Healing from anger and its consequences is possible. We can start by asking God to help us focus our hearts and minds completely on forgiveness...of others...and accepting his forgiveness for ourselves.

A young man without arms played the guitar for the Pope. A paralyzed man was brought to Jesus to be healed. Both showed courage. We pray at every Mass for those who are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness or any other adversity. We should include ourselves in that petition.

And remember what John Paul II said...be courageous...do not be afraid...never give up hope!

