

6th Sunday after Pentecost 2006

A sermon by Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
Delivered on July 23, 2006

Romans 12:6-14 & Matthew 9:1-8

Matthew 9:1-8

Then the Lord got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. There he beheld, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you."

And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This man blasphemes!"

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"-- then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And he arose and departed to his house.

Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Romans 12:6-14

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let us love without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Glory be to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel, we are presented an image of the forgiven sinner in the person of the Paralytic who is healed by Christ. This soul is first forgiven of his sins and then of his bodily ailment. It's not just that Christ was trying to make a point here, and so delayed the miracle of healing that he might show up the scribes and Pharisees, again. Rather this action shows us an image of healing and direction for our own lives. We cannot begin to walk as Christians until we first are forgiven. Though often enough God forgives us for we know not what we do, there are many times when we know very well. In those cases, we cannot be forgiven until we repent. In

the case of today's Gospel, we see that it is the faith of the people around the paralytic that grants this afflicted soul healing of both soul and body. It says "when Jesus saw *their* faith," and we know nothing about the individual state of the suffering man. This is a great testimony to the power of prayer and faith in community. It goes to show us that we do not walk as Christians alone but as a Church, as a communion of sanctified believers. Through that shared and mutually upheld faith, the world may come to marvel at the grace that is revealed.

In today's Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, we are given a miniature image of the Church as a body. The verses immediately preceding today's reading set forth this metaphor:

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. [Romans 12]

Just as the body relies on the interaction of all the organs and limbs to work properly, so too does the church which is the body of Christ. Therefore, "Having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them." St. Paul then appropriately lists seven gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy. Let us consider briefly each of these gifts, in the hopes that we will begin to recognize them in each other and be able to better activate them for the good of the Church. In the next few weeks, God willing, we will look more closely at each gift and see how it may be applied to each of our lives.

If prophecy, let us prophecy in proportion to our faith: The meaning of Prophecy has sadly been lost to modern readers of the Bible. Prophecy is nothing less than the vision of the Kingdom of God. What the prophets beheld in glory was the truly ideal, the vision behind God's work of salvation. In sharing that vision, they came up against those in their day who didn't want to accept what God's will was for them, and were happy with things the way they were, usually

because they stood to benefit and they didn't have to change their way of life. Prophets like Elijah stood up against the corruption of their culture, of institutions, of government, and struggled mightily for God's vision. Today, we need more than ever people who, in proportion to the amount of faith they have, can guide the Church in America to fulfill its unique mission in the history of mankind.

Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering: many of us will find our calling in service or *diakonia*, in ministry, in tending to the needs of others. This is just essential as the work of those who provide the vision and the direction. The work of ministry is the work of the angels. Without it, our words, our scriptures, our faith is as dead as the monuments of ancient Egypt and Babylon. But again, this is a gift of grace. Not everyone is especially good at this type of work, and not everyone is called to do it full time. We must be ready to respond to that call with the faith that it is God's grace that gives us the power to do it, for either the short or long term.

He who teaches, in teaching: Everybody should know that education is crucial to the success of the Church. One of the special graces that comes with teaching is that we often learn best by actually teaching. If any of us is called to teach, and fear that we don't know what to do or say, let us be ready for that with the knowledge that the best way to learn something is to have to teach something. In Isaiah we are told, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!*" Why the feet? Because it is at the feet of the teacher that the students come to learn and hear the gospel.

He who exhorts, in exhortation: Exhortation is another lost idea like prophecy. Those who exhort are those who get people motivated, who inspire the multitude, who reach out and talk to those who are needed. We can only come to know God's calling for us if someone exhorts us. Exhortation is the art of communication for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Exhortation

differs from teaching and preaching because it can be as simple as saying: come and see! There are some of us who have been given the special gift to go out and find the lost sheep. This is another essential role in the building up of Christ's Holy Church.

He who gives, with liberality: Of course, we could not function very well if we must constantly worry about the bills. The Church has survived since the very beginning, as we find in the Book of Acts, by the cheerful giving of the faithful who desire to store their treasure in heaven and by doing so, help bring heaven here on earth. Giving with liberality means giving with freedom, with joy, with generosity. It means giving from the heart whatever one can, with faith in God. Again, some find this to be their special calling, others find it a struggle, but in any case, it remains an essential role in the Church.

He who leads, with diligence: Leadership is particularly important in the Church. As any experienced Church council member can tell us, diligence is necessary to survive. Diligence means we stick to it, we don't give up, we don't give in to easy solutions, quick ways out that only provide temporary solutions to complex problems. Diligence involves patience, patience, and more patience. [Take for example the nuns of Holy Dormition monastery. Had they wanted to, they probably could have built a simpler structure for their monastery and been done with it by now. But they have the foresight and vision to plan to build a structure that can stand for a thousand years. This requires diligence among the leadership.]

He who shows mercy, with cheerfulness: This last gift of grace perhaps summarizes all the rest. When we ask God to show mercy, we hope for many things in that mercy. We hope for all good things: for vision, for ministry, for learning, for encouragement, for prosperity, for patience and strength, and for joy. Mercy is goodness, plain and simple, in whatever form it

takes. Each of us needs to be ready to show another mercy, especially when we become involved with the incredible task of working in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of these seven gifts are general enough that each of us have the potential of using them at some point or another. Each of us will feel that we are better at some things than others, and many of us will be better at some of the gifts than we think. We need to realize that no matter what gift we are given, these gifts are not meant for us alone but for sharing in the building up of our brother and sister in Christ. Together, we are all in the process of bringing our fallen humanity, symbolized by the paralytic of Capernaum, to the feet of the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, that we might all find the healing of our souls and bodies. Amen.