

REFLECTION

The readings in today's Mass are so rich I was challenged as to where to go with this reflection.

In the first reading, Isaiah reminds the people of Israel that God is planning "something new" for them. As they sit in captivity in Babalon they are prodded to imagine how God is going to give them a way through the desert, with rivers to nourish and guide them.

Then in the reading there is a sudden change of tone and direction. God calls them to remember, not God's wonderful deeds, but remember that they had "burdened" God with their sins and their failure to practice the religious obligations of the law. They had grown tired of the practices of worship and failed to call upon God for help.

With this as a background we are reminded that God alone wipes away our "offenses" and "your sins I remember not." In brief, God is saying, don't spend time thinking about what I did long ago, imagine what I am **going** to do.

This Gospel passage from Mark is one of my favorites! In the gospel stories we often read of crowds coming to see and marvel at what Jesus might do or say. Such a crowd was gathered around the house of Jesus to see and hear Him in today's Gospel.

Within this context, four men bring a fifth person to be healed. We might ask why Jesus did not come out, heal the man and get on with His preaching. Why does Mark do the "roof thing", it seems so unnecessary? What is the point of this event?

It might be the faith of the men bringing the paralytic to the house and their intensity of faith moved them to hit the roof. The main event might not be the healing, but the forgiveness of the man's sin. Or perhaps Mark wanted to highlight the ironical statement by the ever-present scribes, "Who but God alone can forgive sins". Their words affirm what Jesus is doing and Who Jesus is.

C. S. Lewis, in *The Magician's Nephew*, (one of the *Chronicles of Narnia*), has one of the characters say, "For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing and also depends on what sort of person you are."

Jesus was standing in the middle, saw the man being lowered through the roof and heard the murmurings of the scribes. What sort of person does that make Jesus?

The scribes see Jesus heal a man, and hear His words of forgiveness. They hear words threatening to their authority. What sort of characters do they possess?

The crowds are standing around the healing event and they see something new and amazing. They had never seen anything like this before. They hear His words of healing, raising and sending.

Then there were the four men who lowered their friend down into the house. They may have seen and heard Jesus before so perhaps they are less amazed. Their faith brought them and their friend to Jesus.

So where we, you and I personally, stand in this picture does determine what we see and hear as well as what sort of character we are. We are probably parts of each group: the crowd, the scribes, the four friends and the one presented to Jesus.

The Scribe in us may resist Jesus' being able to forgive sins, even our own sins.

Perhaps we are a bit of the crowd who watch others being healed.

We are the man on the stretcher who is bidden to rise and get on with living a new way.

Where we stand in a scene such as this and many others from the Gospels will determine what and how we see and hear Jesus.

For Jesus, Missioning is what healing is all about. They laid the man down in faith and Jesus raised Him up and sent him out.

There were obstacles presented to the man's four friends.

There were too many people blocking the doorway.

There were the walls of the house and the awkwardness of the stretcher and the weight of the man.

Any of these could have been reasons or excuses for their leaving the house and the crowd and waiting for a more convenient time for them and perhaps for Jesus. However, the four seized the moment and the stretcher and not letting down their friend, they raised him up on the roof and lowered him in so that Jesus would

- see their faith
- seize His moment
- raise their friend up and
- send him out.

I appreciate that these readings come the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Yes, this week we begin the season of Lent. We have many opportunities to grow closer to God:

- On flier in bulletin

Each one of us comes before Jesus, needing to be forgiven and healed. We may need to help a friend come back to the church for forgiveness and healing. Or WE may need help in coming one Tuesday to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We are invited to lower ourselves to the humble acceptance of our sinfulness so that, like the people of Israel and the man on the stretcher, Jesus might see our faith and send us back home, freed from our pasts to be and do the "new thing".