

**Homily for February 23, 2003  
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Hosea 2:16b, 17b, 21-22  
2 Corinthians 3:3b-6  
Mark 2:18-22**

*God is getting ready to do something altogether new,  
and our prayer makes way for this invasion of God.*

Back in the days of Jesus it was the common belief that if a person was ill or suffered reversals in business, it was because of some sin that person had committed. And conversely, if a person enjoyed success of health and commerce, it must have been because of the virtue that person practiced. Sin resulted in disaster or punishment, physically and otherwise. Virtue resulted in well being and success. And God alone was the arbiter, the decider, the judge – no human agent could intervene.

Well, we can understand the chagrin and upset and scandal Jesus caused by boldly saying to the paralytic: “Your sins are forgiven.” It was a total upset of the retribution applecart. After all, what had the paralytic done to be rendered immobile for the rest of his life? Surely he must have done something. That is precisely why the religious leaders took umbrage at the absolution given by Jesus. What right did he have messing up God’s judgment? If God were going to forgive the man, he’d do it in the same way he

punished him, only in reverse. God would set the man free of his paralysis as a clear indication that he was also forgiven. The man had to be deserving of what he got – good or bad.

Along came Jesus and usurped the authority of God by forgiving the sins first without even a blink at the paralysis issue and then turning around using the healing of the paralysis as evidence that God was at work powerfully there. It was a total and complete scandal.

Never again could people associate illness or misadventure with God’s punishment for sin. In meeting Jesus, people were meeting no less than God. God does not love us more if we do good or any less if we do bad. God just loves and wills the completion and fulfillment of every human being. God was doing something radically new in Jesus by reversing the common way of thinking at that time.

How is God reversing our thinking in our day? The trust we have hitherto placed in our church leadership has come under fire. The number of clergy will not be sufficient to meet the needs we have grown accustomed to having met. God is doing something new today as God did in the person of Jesus centuries ago. The Body of Christ becomes again the agent of change.

Look at those who carried the paralyzed man to the roof and set him before Jesus. They served as

intercessors, petitioners, those who plea on behalf of the one who cannot or will not speak for himself. That's what you and I can be today – those who pray, or fast, who make room for the invasion of God by the emptiness our fasting and prayer promote. After all, that is the purpose of all penance – not to earn anything from God, but to make room to receive what God already wishes to give.

On May 22 of this year we shall have a Parish Convocation that will take place on a Thursday evening for about two hours. During that time we will be deciding, voting, prioritizing the challenges that our parish faces. As a prelude to that evening of May 22, I strongly recommend that we spend this Lent in prayer, in fasting and in works of kindness so that we can intercede not only for our parish and the decisions that must be made, but for the larger Church, our deanery, our archdiocese. In the weeks and months ahead, we will all be invited to be part of a diocesan-wide consultation process to look to our shared future and how we will cope with it. Our parish is a bit ahead of the game in this regard because we've done so much planning and are so involved in the planning of neighboring parishes in the deanery. But for now, as Lent approaches, we can become the intercessors, the agents of change, those who plea on behalf of all the Church in need.

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