

The lesson that this reading gives us is how important faith is in our spiritual life. Having faith in our hearts opens for us the door into the spiritual world. It was through the firm faith of his four friends that the sick man was deemed worthy to receive healing as is clearly stated in the text of the Gospel. Their faith was so strong in the belief that the Savior would help their friend that they did not let anything stand in the way of their accomplishing their mission. Their active expression of their love was so pleasing to the Savior that He could not but return that love. He rewarded them with what they came to Him for and healed their friend.

What a profound faith-empowered example of love is given to us by this act. We live in a world where more and more people are isolated from each other. Having in general a very fulfilling life and being cut off from needing to personally interact with other people discourages us from wanting to deal with situations that take us out of our comfort zone. Our hearts grow cold, and we do not go out of our way to help someone in need.

But this is not what our Savior expects and demands of us. He loves us and provides for all of our needs. He made the ultimate sacrifice for each one of us. He suffered and died in order to reconcile us with God and open for us the door to salvation. In return, He expects us to emulate Him and love Him back by loving each other. His life was a life of service to people. We are also called to demonstrate in our life an active, and when necessary, self-sacrificing care for our neighbor.

That an absence of faith in a person is deadly can be seen from the reaction of the scribes to Christ's mercy. Their lack of faith prevents them from accepting what are in actuality two miraculous healings. Jesus begins by healing first the real cause of the man's sickness. He tells the man that his sins are forgiven. Our sins weaken our soul, making it sick. The condition of our body, intimately connected to the soul, is infected and sickened. To be truly healed, the soul must first be made well, which is what the Savior does. Then it is possible to perform the second miracle, the healing of the body.

But the scribes, with their hearts made cold by the lack of faith and animosity to the Savior, could not accept what was obvious. It was a true miracle because the man who was too weak to walk and who had to be carried on a bed, after being healed, not only is able to get up, but has the strength to walk away carrying the bed that he had been brought on. They ignored the miracle by questioning the Savior's authority to forgive sins in the first place. Rejecting the miracle, they were rejecting the Savior. By rejecting the Savior, they were rejecting salvation.

One might question why the scribes hated Christ so much when He was the promised Savior. This was because He was a threat. They had become so attached to their worldly values and possessions that they would not allow anybody to threaten their life style. They wanted no part of the spiritual, self-sacrificing way of life that Jesus was requiring in order to earn eternal life and salvation. In their hearts, they perverted love from the true divine love to an egotistical love of self-satisfaction. They chose this world over God.

This dilemma of the scribes is a dilemma that we face every day. If we allow the world and our attachment to worldly values and comforts to overcome us, we too are in danger of making the same fatal mistake made by the scribes. Our Church teaches us that we are in the world but not of the world. This is why we need to continually work on strengthening our spiritual faith to ensure that our spiritual life and the needs of that life are not completely sacrificed to the pursuit of our worldly happiness and comfort.

As we read and think about the message of this Sunday's Gospel, I pray that God gives all of us the strength to be inspired by and to act with the type of faith possessed by the four friends of the sick man. At the same time, hopefully we will be able to discern clearly the deadly nature of the temptations of the worldly way of life that was chosen by the scribes.

What better time to begin this salvific work than during Great Lent. May God bless us in this lenten undertaking and lead us without wavering down the spiritual road leading into our eternal, blessed Heavenly Home.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar