

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

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



Japan: *Tanin no fukou wa mitsu no aji*
France: *joie maligne*
Russia: *zloradstvo*
Germany: *Schadenfreude*

You may not be familiar with the words in the text box above, but I am sure you will be familiar with the meaning of the words. These all describe a smug pleasure that might be felt in witnessing someone else's suffering or misfortune. The Japanese apparently have a saying 'The misfortune of others, is like sweet honey' (*Tanin no fukou wa mitsu no aji*). This would seem to be an ancient emotion – The Greeks knew it as *epichairekakia* (rejoicing over disgrace), and the Romans as *malevolentia* (the root of 'malevolence').

Interestingly, very few languages accommodate the feeling of the opposite emotion. One exception is '*firgun*'. This is a relatively recent Hebrew word (1970's). *Firgun* signifies the joy one feels when another person succeeds. Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly given our modern culture, there is no literal English translation!

In our gospel reading for today we read how after getting into a boat and crossing to his own town. Jesus is approached by people carrying a paralysed man on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "***Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.***" Then scribes who witnessed this said to 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,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - he then said to the paralytic - "Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.***" And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such power to men.

So, what do you think best reflects the attitude of the scribes? *Malevolentia* or *Firgun*? And what about Jesus, what about his attitude toward the paralytic and toward the scribes? Attitude is so important! Our attitude to church attendance, our attitude toward church involvement, our attitude toward each other, our attitude toward, clergy, etc, etc.

If we in anyway distance ourselves from the Church and our Lord, we will become spiritually sick we will be cutting ourselves off from that which truly nourishes us. This lack of nourishment will weaken our souls, until eventually, we can no longer respond to God: we will become much like the paralysed man in our gospel reading.

There are many today who have little interest in the Christian faith. One reason that is often used to explain this is that the Christians they know do not seem different from anyone else. This may of course just be an excuse to not 'believe'. However, it is perfectly understandable that people will not be attracted to something that does not appear to make a difference.

In our epistle reading (Romans 12: 6-14) St Paul tells us that we should live out our faith with humility, right thinking and the proper use of spiritual gifts, and that our faith is intimately linked to good works which are, ultimately, the expression of our faith. Our faith and how we express that is in turn an expression of our attitude. St Paul calls us to be genuine in showing love, mercy and honour to others; to accept the difficult challenges life may offer us with hope, patience, and prayer. As our Lord taught, Paul the apostle reminds us to '***Bless those who persecute you***'.

None of which can be accomplished in our own strength, our own power, but rather by responding to our Lord's love and grace. And we can only do that when we have a living relationship with our Lord, Jesus.

We can see clearly from today's gospel reading what it means to encounter our Lord in this way. Our Lord not only forgave the sins of the paralysed man but also provided proof of his divine authority to the sceptical scribes.

Regardless of our attitude, whether we accept it or not, it is the will of our Lord that we allow him to meet with each of us; to heal us, to strengthen us, to enable us to share in His divine image and likeness, to live a life of holiness to become icons of the healing and love that this world so desperately needs.

Today, as we remember the healing of the paralytic, we also celebrate the 'Procession of the Honourable wood of the Life-giving Cross of the Lord'. The origin of this Feast is explained in the Greek *Horologion* of 1897: "Because of the illnesses which occur during the month of August, it was customary at Constantinople to carry the Precious Wood of the Cross in procession throughout the city for its sanctification, and to deliver it from sickness."

On the eve (July 31), the Cross was removed from the imperial treasury and placed upon the Holy Table of the Great Church of Hagia Sophia (which is dedicated to Christ, the Wisdom of God). From August 1 until the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, there was a procession throughout the entire the city, and then the Cross was placed where all the people could venerate it.

As with the paralysed man, we are offered a further image of brokenness. This time the image of brokenness, is not that of sickness, but of sacrifice in the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour. This sacrifice resulted in the Resurrection that opened for all mankind the gates of paradise; that allowed mankind to be forgiven, healed and restored through repentance – a change of mind – a change of attitude.

17th July was International Firgun Day, promoting the idea of giving compliments and praising others without ulterior motive or agenda. Let us move beyond Firgun; Let us step it up and **"be of good cheer"** (Mat 9:2) and obey our Lord's command,

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13 v 34)

