

Next Service

**Sunday
March 11th**

Sunday of the Cross

**Divine Liturgy
at 10:00 am**

at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

All welcome!

Important:

**There will be no
Great Vespers service
on Saturday,
March 10th**

Instead, members of our parish will attend the day-long Lenten retreat, **Standing at the Cross**, presented by the Very Rev. Dr. John Behr.

For more information or to join our group contact Cynthia Eyler at ceyler@twcny.rr.com

SAVE THE DATE:

Archbishop Michael will be with us for Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesday, March 21st.

A Lenten buffet-style dinner will follow the service.

Important Update:

Fr. Luke will be taking a much needed absence from serving our parish for health reasons. Please keep him in your prayers.

This weekend we welcomed Fr. Dimitri Choueiry, Khouria Rita and their four wonderful children for lively, spirit-filled worship services.



Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian:

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, vain-heartedness, lust of power and idle talk.

[prostration]

Instead, give me the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.

[prostration]

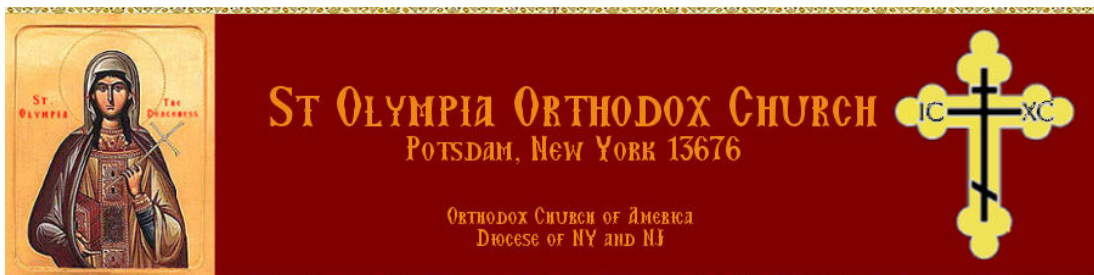
Yea, Lord and King, grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

[prostration]

Lastly, we see the power of forgiving sins possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you," He knew the Scribes by whom He was surrounded and what was in their hearts. He heard them grumbling, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And in that they were right. Where they were wrong was in thinking that this Jesus was, not God-with-us, but just some backwoods Rabbi from the middle of nowhere. So Jesus says, "But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins," He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." On their own authority, in their own power, no angel in heaven, no human on earth, no church in council, no bishop or priest or pastor, can take away from the sinner's conscience the load of guilt, and give that person peace with God. That power and prerogative belongs to God alone, a power and prerogative which the Father has put in the hands of His Son Jesus Christ.

But the wonder of it is that Jesus has delegated that power and prerogative to His Church. In John 20:22-23 we hear the risen Jesus on that first Pascha evening saying to His disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Why did Jesus delegate this power to His Church? Well, we have in 1 John 1:9 the assurance that "if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But despite that assurance, over the years, in hearing Confessions, I've still had people say, "I hope that God forgives me." But we never have to wonder or worry or just "hope" that God forgives our repentant heart, because the forgiveness pronounced by the priest is not his forgiveness; it's God's forgiveness. Acting through His Church, Jesus Christ our great High Priest is still mighty to forgive and pardon, tender-hearted and willing to save.

The question is whether or not we're willing to be pardoned and saved. Do we bring our sin-paralyzed souls to Him in honest repentance? Do we seek His absolution? Do we have any real interest at all in hearing for our own selves His voice, saying, "Your sins are forgiven you"? If not, we're still in our sins. Is that where we want to be? It's your choice...and mine too.



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

Join us for prayer and fellowship.

**Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday
and are preceded by Great Vespers every Saturday evening.**

Services are primarily in English.

Second Sunday of Great Lent - St. Gregory Palamas

Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

In today's Gospel, we find the Lord Jesus again at His "home base" in Capernaum. Jesus made this town in Galilee His home because He wasn't welcome in His real home town of Nazareth. Jesus made the people of Nazareth uncomfortable; He didn't fit into their ideas and expectations of what a carpenter's kid should grow up to be. Ultimately, as we see in Mark 6:1-6, the people of Nazareth rejected this native Son: "they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.'" The Cross was the culmination of our Lord's suffering for our sake; but surely being rejected, unappreciated, discounted and written off by the people who'd known Him all His life also cut deeply. But here we see Jesus working despite His pain, still preaching the word, and still healing those that were sick. And that's clearly a lesson in the need to just hang in there and be faithful regardless of very imperfect conditions, and regardless of the cost. The cross we have to take up daily and carry may not be violent persecution; it could be family, friends and neighbours who don't "get" why Christ and His Gospel must come first in our lives.

Now, in today's Gospel, the forgiving and healing of a paralytic, we see three things that should challenge us to some serious stock-taking. Firstly, we see the great spiritual privileges some people enjoy and yet make no use of them. No city or town enjoyed so much of our Lord's physical presence during His earthly ministry as did Capernaum. This was the place where He worked many of His miracles, and where He preached many of His sermons. But nothing that Jesus said or did seems to have had much effect on the hearts of the people of Capernaum. Oh yes, they crowded to hear Him; verse 2 says that as soon as word spread that Jesus was back in town "immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them." And they were astonished at His mighty works; as verse 12 says, they "were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this.'" And they were privileged to hear His word from His own lips. They heard; but they didn't listen, because they were not converted. They lived in the presence of Grace Incarnate, yet their hearts remained hard, such that in Matthew 11:23-24 they drew from the Lord Jesus the heaviest condemnation that He ever pronounced against any place other than Jerusalem: "And you Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

And especially now, in our observance of Lent, it's good for all of us to reflect on Capernaum, because each of us stands in peril of becoming just like those folks. Let's face it: our life in Christ can become routine to the point where we hear the words of Scripture, the words of the Liturgy, the words of the sermon, but no longer listen to them with both our mind and our heart. And let's admit how easily our astonishment and amazement at being gifted with the Lord's true Body and true Blood in Holy Communion fades into unprepared and unappreciated participation in what the late Fr. Alexander growled was a "sloppy agape." And how often have you and I caught ourselves saying the words of our prayers but thinking about breakfast or the tasks of the day ahead? We all tend to forget or seriously underestimate the amazing power of unbelief, and the danger of taking for granted God and the things of God.

Look: before we're born again in the waters of Holy Baptism, we're like a car that's been in a wreck. It's not a write-off, totally beyond repair; but it's gonna take lots and lots of work to get it up and running and looking like new. Being born again in Holy Baptism is only the beginning of a process of God acting in grace and love to clean up and re-create us. By Baptism we're towed into the shop, so the Divine Mechanic can start fixing us, straightening the frame, replacing the broken parts, pounding out the dents, grinding down the sharp bits of metal, and ultimately repainting and detailing us. That process is what we call "sanctification;" and it doesn't happen overnight, because God does a proper job. But we have to let ourselves be repaired and never taken any of it for granted. In this case, familiarity can really breed contempt; and nothing seems to harden the human heart against the Gospel as much as hearing the Gospel regularly and yet deliberately preferring sin and the world. That's why Hebrews 6:7-8 warns us that "the ground which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned."

Secondly, we see here how great a blessing affliction may prove to a person's soul. The paralyzed man, helpless and powerless, was carried by four friends to Jesus, that the Lord might heal him. And Jesus did heal him---but not just in his body. Our Lord not only restored the paralytic to health and strength, but also healed the man's broken soul, paralyzed by sin and guilt. And it was that healing which was for this man the beginning of eternal life. And dollars to donuts, for the rest of his life that man thanked God for the paralysis that led him to Jesus. Without it, he would never have been brought to Christ, and would never have heard those joy-giving words, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." In the long run, that paralysis was not a curse, but a blessing.

And when affliction, troubles, suffering, hit us hard (and in this broken world they will and they do), how about we let the thought of this paralytic bring our complaining to a screeching halt, and we start searching for and focusing on the blessing God is undertaking to give us. No, God does not send affliction; God is not the author of suffering. But if we'll give Him half a chance, God will always prove faithful to His word in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God." In every age we can find believers who can testify that they learned wisdom by affliction and that losses have proved real gains; they can testify from personal experience that King David knew what he was talking about when in Psalm 119:71, he says to God, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." We may not be able to see it in the moment; but we can be sure there's a need for every cross, and a wise reason for every trial; that in every sickness and sorrow God is sending us a message of grace, calling us to draw closer to Him...which means we need to make sure that, as we're told in Hebrews 12:25, we "do not refuse Him Who speaks.

Lastly, we see the power of forgiving sins possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you," He knew the Scribes by whom He was surrounded and what was in their hearts. He heard them grumbling, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And in that they were right. Where they were wrong was in thinking that this Jesus was, not God-with-us, but just some backwoods Rabbi from the middle of nowhere. So Jesus says, "But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins," He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." On their own authority, in their own power, no angel in heaven, no human on earth, no church in council, no bishop or priest or pastor, can take away from the sinner's conscience the load of guilt, and give that person peace with God. That power and prerogative belongs to God alone, a power and prerogative which the Father has put in the hands of His Son Jesus Christ.

But the wonder of it is that Jesus has delegated that power and prerogative to His Church. In John 20:22-23 we hear the risen Jesus on that first Pascha evening saying to His disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Why did Jesus delegate this power to His Church? Well, we have in 1 John 1:9 the assurance that "if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But despite that assurance, over the years, in hearing Confessions, I've still had people say, "I hope that God forgives me." But we never have to wonder or worry or just "hope" that God forgives our repentant heart, because the forgiveness pronounced by the priest is not his forgiveness; it's God's forgiveness. Acting through His Church, Jesus Christ our great High Priest is still mighty to forgive and pardon, tender-hearted and willing to save.

The question is whether or not we're willing to be pardoned and saved. Do we bring our sin-paralyzed souls to Him in honest repentance? Do we seek His absolution? Do we have any real interest at all in hearing for our own selves His voice, saying, "Your sins are forgiven you"? If not, we're still in our sins. Is that where we want to be? It's your choice...and mine too.