

The Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ
According to St. Mark
Chapter Two

Read 2:1-12

OSB Note 2:1-12

OBS: Christ here returns to the house where He was staying in Capernaum, this is probably Simon's house (see 1:29). Houses of working men usually could hold a max of fifty people. B/c of Jesus' popularity there were apparently many more than this crowded around Peter's house who wanted to see Him and listen to the Word He was preaching (v. 2).

V. 3 Then four men come carrying a paralytic lying on a pallet (or a light mattress) to see Jesus. The large crowd makes it impossible, but they do not give up. Their faith in Christ and desire for healing for their friend drives them to carry him up the exterior steps of the home (which were common on homes in those days), which led up to a flat roof. These roofs were usually made of tiles and thatch, making it relatively easy for one to dig through, and this is just what they did, gently lowering him through the roof into the Presence of Christ.

We can imagine the astonishment of the apostles (v. 4), and especially Simon-Peter, seeing his roof being destroyed. What Christ saw, however, was the faith of the bold group, which refused to be deterred. So tenderly, he says to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5).

Some ask why the Lord first speaks (v. 5) of "forgiveness" when their obvious request was for healing? In those days it was believed and understood that healing for the body was strongly connected with forgiveness for the soul. This is because man is a

single compound of soul and body. It may not be in every instance that a specific sickness is caused by a specific sin; but, in general, sickness has afflicted our race because of sin and, to be completely whole, a person needs both forgiveness and healing. [This, btw, is the root meaning behind our the Holy Mystery of Anointing which beseeches God for both healing and forgiveness of sins (based on St. James 5:13-18)]. Jesus, being the Divine Son of God, knows that this man particularly needs forgiveness as well as healing.

V. 6 Jesus' claim to be able to forgive sins, horrifies the scribes. So they question in their hearts, "who is this Jesus, a man on earth, to speak for God in heaven. Authority to judge is God's alone."

V. 8 Jesus, again being Divine, has intimate knowledge in His inner spirit of the secrets of men's hearts. The word translated "perceived" is from the Gr. *epiginosko* which means to really-know. So Jesus doesn't just have *gnosis*, or knowledge he has *epignosis*, complete knowledge of their inner reasoning's.

V.9 Regarding Jesus' question, "Which is easier," they would have to admit that both were impossible for mere men. No one can forgive sins -OR- heal a paralytic with a mere word.

Add: But Jesus' question, "Which is easier?" In other words the people were willing to accept a "miracle worker" doing signs and wonders but they weren't willing to accept a Divine miracle worker." Jesus is Divine and He is trying to help them understand this. In other words, Jesus didn't come just to do wonders. He came to save us and restore us. This is the whole point of His incarnation: our human nature was under the dominion of death and unable to be delivered on our own. by Jesus assuming our human nature and joining it to His Divine nature, He gave our nature the potential and possibility for Theosis, the possibility of Divinization, to be partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 2:4),

Transfiguration -all of that comes about because of our Lord's incarnation. So Jesus is not just a "miracle worker" as many popular views of Him try to lead us to believe. No, He was the Divine Son of God. This is our Orthodox Faith.

So Jesus' reply is,, "that you many know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." Just as in the exorcism, Jesus again gives evidence of His divine authority to forgive sins by working this great miracle of healing.

V. 12 Christ's miracle led all the crowd to glorify God for a work the likes of which they had never before seen. This miracle sets the stage for the controversy between Christ and His foes that would continue throughout the Gospel and led ultimately to His death.

OBS Summary: This miracle sets the stage for the controversy between Christ and His foes that will continue throughout the rest of this Gospel and lead ultimately to His death. The central question is: Who is Jesus of Nazareth? So this miracle is given at the outset of the conflict to prove the point that Christ the incarnate Son exercises on earth the authority given Him by His Father God in heaven. According to St. Paul, Jesus is Himself the expression of the fullness of the Father (Heb. 1). Here is the Faith of the Church, which she would later embody in the Creed [Symbol of Faith], already proclaimed and proven.

Read 2:13-17

OBS 2:13-17 cf. Mt 9:9-13

OBS: v.13 The Lord again is surrounded by a crowd and teaching about the Kingdom of God and He soon shows them how to come into this Kingdom. As He was passing He sees Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-office. Such tax collectors were familiar sights in those days. They sat at conspicuous places, where as

customs officers, they could easily exact a custom tax of those merchants traveling over road or bridge. They were heartily hated by the common folk, who, because the tax collectors served the conquering Romans and were corrupt, classified them with the murderers and robbers and would have nothing to do with them. It is this despised individual that Christ invites with the words, "Follow Me."

Levi, (later known as Matthew; Mt 9:9) had doubtless heard much about this Prophet of Nazareth. As a tax collector, he had taken it for granted that respectable and religious people detested him, and could hardly dare to hope for anything else. But here was a religious man, a famous man, a popular Rabbi, opening His heart to him, accepting him, forgiving him, and calling him -personally and by name- to join Him. He was offered a new life, one filled with unknown adventure certainly, but also one filled with the peace of God. Levi jumps at the chance, leaving his tax table, and making a complete break with his profitable past. "So he arose and followed Him" (v. 14).

Because Levi wants to honor his Teacher, he hosts a huge reception. His own friends were most likely there, that is, other tax collectors and notoriously immoral people (for that is the meaning of "sinners" in this context). These were probably the only friends Levi had. Pious folk usually took great pains to avoid such people and would certainly not eat with them. To eat with someone, to accept one's hospitality, meant to accept him and this was clearly out of the question for any pious person.

Yet our Lord accepts Levi and enters his home (v. 15) and reclines at table with many tax collectors and sinners who shared table-fellowship with him as interested hearers. The scribes, fresh from being scandalized (v. 6), are scandalized again (v. 16). No truly pious man would eat with such riffraff, knowing he would be contaminated. Jesus knows the outrage in their hearts and

compassionately tries to reclaim them also. Rather than rebuking them and their judgmental attitude, He tries to help them see a new perspective and gives them a parabolic image: the strong and the healthy have no need of a physician -only those who are sick. In other words, a physician goes to the homes of those who are sick.

It was an image meant to shake the scribes out of their old ways of thinking. Of course Christ came to call both the righteous (like Simeon) and the sinners (like Levi). This was a normal Hebrew way of producing a dichotomy in order to make a point (like in Hosea 6:6 where God says, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice"). In fact, God desired both "mercy and sacrifice." But the dichotomy forcibly underscores the point made: sacrifice is nothing without mercy. It is the same with this parable: the point is that God's mercy is shown especially in the repentance of sinners. So the Pharisees should not stumble and reject Christ simply because He eats with notorious sinners. P-42.

Read 2:18-22

OSB Note 2:18-22; cf. Mt 9:14-17a

OBS: Some now find something else to accuse Jesus of (v. 18): He wasn't fasting. The pious in Israel fasted twice every week (Thurs & Fridays). This is part of the reason why, according to the Didache, Christians fast twice a week on Wed & Fridays. So on those days, pious Jews ate nothing until the evening. It is likely that Levi's feast takes place on a fast day and here was Jesus and His disciples setting aside the Jewish customs. So the disciples of John and of the Pharisees come fasting and refusing to eat. They came up to Jesus (who no doubt was reclining at table and eating) and challenged Him directly (v. 18). In other words they were saying, "Everyone else, including the Baptist, is fasting today. Why don't You make Your disciples fast too?"

Jesus does not rule out fasting (actually He affirms it and mandates it for His disciples; Mt. 6:16-18), but He also doesn't insist on inflexibility. Rules must always give way to the primacy of love. In this case it was love for Levi and his friends whom Jesus was trying to bring into the Kingdom. The old way said, "The letter of the Law is everything; there can be no exceptions." The new way of Christ says, "Love is everything; there must be allowance for exceptions to rules [or disciplines]." P. 43-44

Christ again uses a parable to teach this, referring to a wedding feast (v. 19). In those days a wedding feast would go on for seven days. Even though it might include a Monday or Thursday (fast days,) obviously as long as the wedding feast is being held and the groom is present, the wedding guests could not fast. It would be an unthinkable insult to the bridegroom and his bride. Fasting is an expression of sorrow for sin. So, the point of this parable is, if people would not fast during a wedding, how much more should they not fast while they have the joy of the Son of God with them!

OBS: Then the Lord points them to His upcoming crucifixion, and He tells them (v. 20), the days for fasting will come.

OBS: V. 21 What is really being contrasted is the old way of thinking to Christ's new way. One cannot inherit the Kingdom while clinging to the old ways. The New Covenant cannot be combined with the Old. It would be like (v. 21) trying to combine a new patch of unshrunk cloth to a old garment. Or its like trying to (v. 22) put new wine into old. Old wineskins are tough, leathery and inflexible with no stretch left in them. If one puts freshly fermented new wine into those old skins, the wine will expand too much for the inflexible skins and burst them. The same can be said of the Gospel. It cannot be placed into the inflexible skins of the Old Testament.

OSB Note 2:18-22, cf. Mt 9:14-17b

Read 2:23-28

OSB Note 2:23-28; cf. Lk 6:1-5b (Christ gives the bread of life to all)

OBS: Next the Pharisees object to the behavior of Jesus' disciples on the Sabbath. As they hurried from town to town with little time to eat, Jesus and His disciples were going through grainfields. As they went, His disciples picked the heads of the grain, rubbing them in their palms and blowing away the chaff in order to eat the grain remaining in their hands **for their hunger** (almost like a granola snack). Such behavior was allowed by the Law, which permitted the traveler to eat such food (Deut. 23:25). **But** the Pharisees with their detailed elaboration of the basic law forbidding work on the Sabbath (e.g., Ex 20:8-11 forbids "harvesting") could only see violations of the Law and sin.

God in His Law forbade work on the Sabbath -but it was the Pharisees who define work in such a way as to empty the divine Law of common sense and authentic content. By their manmade traditions they were making void the Law of God. They could not see the great mission the disciples were engaged in as they served Jesus, not could they perceive the legitimacy of satisfying their hunger as they performed their mission.

Jesus points them to the example of the Scriptures where men had to do what was technically not permitted in order to meet basic human need. In the passage which makes reference to the highpriest Abiathar (1 Kings 21, LXX) David and his companions were hungry as they fled from Saul. They had nothing to eat but the bread of presentation (or showbread), the twelve loaves which were set out in the Holy Place and were only permitted to be

eaten by the priests (Lev 24:9). Their genuine human need and hunger took primacy over technical details of the Law. These Pharisees were concerned about honoring the Sabbath - and unconcerned about their fellow man. Yet, as Jesus explains (v. 27), the Sabbath was brought into existence by God because of man, for the sake of his welfare and rest (Deut 5:12-15).

OBS V. 28 Christ who is the messianic Son of Man, since He is the Lord of men, is Lord even of the Sabbath (since the Sabbath was made for man). Jesus is stating He has authority to declare what was and was not allowed on the Sabbath. Claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath is, in fact, tantamount to claiming the authority of God Himself. This is our faith. We sing it each week in the Divine Liturgy in the hymn known as the Monogenes (Only-begotten):

O Only-begotten Son & Word of God, who, being immortal, deigned for our salvation to become incarnate of the holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and became man without change; you were also crucified, O Christ our God, and by death have trampled Death, being One of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us.

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST!

Sub-Dn. Lazarus Der-Ghazarian
St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church
23300 King Dr., Clinton Twp, MI, Eparchy of Parma
<http://www.stnicksdetroit.com/>

Webservant - St. Gregory the Illuminator Institute
<http://www.looys.net/>

"With God all things are possible... We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us... Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel!"