

IV EPIPHANY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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Two men...one Jewish...one Gentile...their paths cross as they come to Jesus for help...and healing!

Jesus has just finished a series of talks on a hillside outside Capernaum...his famous *Sermon on the Mount*. A large crowd is still hanging around Jesus as he makes his way back to town. They would soon see epiphanies...showings...of great faith and humility.

From a distance a man with a terrible skin condition asks Jesus if he wants to make him well again. Jesus does something remarkable and reaches out and touches him. Jesus tells him to do what the Law requires...go see the priest...who would verify his skin condition had cleared up.

Any noticeable skin condition was cause for alarm...it might be contagious. And both the man with the skin condition and those around him believed his illness was God's punishment for something bad he or someone in his family had done. Jesus would later say God doesn't set out to hurt people...he wants them well.

The man with the skin condition was ostracized from society...cut off from his family and community and from the life of the Temple. He was someone to avoid. His life was one of poverty and starvation. Jesus did what he always does...he healed him...his life was restored.

A Roman officer then approaches Jesus. He too keeps his distance...out of respect for Jesus. He asks Jesus to heal his young servant who is paralyzed and in a bad state. The Roman officer shows compassion and concern for his servant. Although he is a man of status...he displays uncharacteristic humility. And it impresses Jesus!

Jesus is ready to follow the officer, but he is told he doesn't deserve to have him come to his house. All Jesus has to do is say the word and his servant will be well again. Jesus calls the officer's faith "great" because he did not ask Jesus to prove himself with a magic show. "Great faith"...comes from the heart.

The Roman officer was an experienced military leader in charge of about 100 soldiers. Saint Luke tells us he was friendly toward the Jewish community in Capernaum...and even contributed funds to help build the local synagogue.

When Jesus offers to come to his house to heal his servant...a direct violation of Jewish Law prohibiting entry to a pagan house...the officer stops him. In a powerful demonstration of faith and humility...the officer says he too is a man under authority...and he has other soldiers under him. He asks Jesus to just say the word...and his servant will be well again. Jesus' word was good enough!

In healing a Jewish man of a terrible skin condition that made him an outcast even from his own people...and in healing the young servant of a despised Roman officer...Jesus shows he does not discriminate when he heals people. And he never said no to anyone who asked for his help.

Salvation...restoration...wholeness...healing...are available to entire world. Jesus tells us God's plan for salvation will bring together people from every corner of the world...especially those who through no fault of their own find themselves disenfranchised from society.

The two men in today's Gospel came from very different backgrounds. Both recognized in Jesus he was the one they could turn to when they needed healing. Through their humility and faith they became epiphanies...showings...of God's power and glory.

Humility and faith go hand in hand and are connected to healing. Jesus wants us to come to him in humility and faith...the kind of humility and faith a Jewish man with a skin condition showed...the kind the kind of humility and faith a Roman officer showed...the kind of humility and faith that says God knows what we need even before we ask for his help.

That is the "great faith" Jesus wants to see...and it begins in our hearts.

