

EP THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. 22 MARK 2

Chapter two begins with people wanting healing mobbing the house where Jesus stayed. The house was so crowded that four men, desperate to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus, created an opening in the roof of the house and lowered their friend to the floor. Jesus was pleased by their faith, and healed the man. It was what Jesus said as he healed the man that makes this story memorable: “My son, your sins are forgiven” (2:5). The scribes who were present were shocked by what they considered to be blasphemy, because only God can forgive sins. At first we may be puzzled by Jesus’ question in response to the scribes: is it easier to grant forgiveness or healing? He asked this because there is no immediate, obvious proof that a person has been forgiven of sins, whereas it is easy to tell whether a person has been healed. The healing is evidence that He had the authority to forgive sins because, if He didn’t have this authority, the man would not have been healed.

The story of the calling of Levi (St. Matthew) shows that Jesus can heal sick souls. Levi was a tax collector — a group of people who not only made their livings by overcharging the people on their taxes, but did so on behalf of the pagan Romans who occupied Judea. Levi, however, not only immediately left behind this sinful life and followed Jesus, but he also celebrated by throwing a party and inviting his friends so that they could have the opportunity to meet Jesus. The scribes were shocked that Jesus ate with tax collectors and other sinners, because pious Jews kept their distance from people who were unclean. Jesus corrected the scribes, saying that He came to earth

specifically to reach sinners and bring them to repentance and relationship with Him.

Both Pharisees and disciples of St. John the Baptist confront Jesus about fasting: since faithful Jews fasted, why didn’t Jesus’ disciples? Jesus answered that it would be inappropriate for His followers to fast while He is with them (just as nobody fasts at a wedding feast), but that they will fast after He leaves (in His Ascension to heaven). Jesus used two parables to explain what He means. Jesus’ disciples have a new religious understanding and spiritual life because of their relationship with Him, and thus to force them to follow practices that do not relate to their current life in Christ would spiritually damage them. The disciples, beginning their lives in Christ and not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, were not strong enough for what Blessed Theophylact calls “the strong commandment of fasting.” Later, when Jesus had left and the Holy Spirit had come down upon them, the disciples would be ready to fast in order to overcome their passions and prepare themselves for the return of Christ.

The Pharisees later criticized Jesus and His disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath (violating the law against working on the Sabbath). Jesus reminds them that David and his men ate showbread that had been offered to God (1 Samuel 21:1-6); this is important because eating the showbread was a greater violation of the Law than plucking grain on the Sabbath, and yet David was not condemned for His action. The Sabbath was therefore not created simply to be a religious rule that must be imposed on life, but instead was created by God to meet the physical and spiritual needs of humans.

A QUICK TIP FOR YOUR LIFE

THE SABBATH

Everyone needs time for rest, to meditate on our lives and our relationship with God, and to pray without worrying about school or work. Bishop Mitrophan Znosko gives an excellent suggestion about observing Sunday as a Sabbath: “Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, is not a day to spend sitting around the home mesmerized in front of the television or going shopping; it is the day to go to church, to pray, and to reinvigorate our lives. Sunday is intended to be an active commemoration of the Lord.” What can you do on Sunday to grow in communion with God?

