

News at St. Mary's– March 2008
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St. Mary's Indian Orthodox Church of Rockland

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Vicar's Message

People love to give money for great purposes like charity. Giving habits are different with the cause rather than the financial stability of the individual. Individuals and organizations set apart funds for charity. We can think about Bill Gates, Oprah and others spend millions on philanthropically oriented programs. As I understand Oprah raise funds through her television programs, and she spends all the funds collected go directly to those who are in real need. She uses her own money for travel and working with the charitable programs. Bill Gates and others spend their own money for charity. I was reading about 'secret Santa' the man who was spending more than 1.3 billion dollars; the money he earned through his business with phone companies and cable television channels. . He was unknown to public until Oprah brought out his identity, few months before his death in 2007. He was Larry Stewart, businessman from Mississippi, who loved to give hundred dollar bills directly to people who are in real need. He did not like any publicity and did not want any one to know him.



Larry developed this habit through an incident in his life. When he was young, there was a time he was unemployed and did not have any money to buy food. He went to a local restaurant and ordered food. As he finished eating he started acting like he forgot to take his wallet. The restaurant owner came to him and looked around and put a 20-dollar bill on his table and told Larry that he found this money on the floor. Ted Hon the restaurant owner tried to make Larry believe that Larry dropped that money when he was searching for his wallet. Actually the restaurant owner was putting that money there not to embarrass Larry. This incident in his life was a turning point to him to help people without embarrassing them or receiving any publicity for giving. If you like to read further please visit the website for 'secret Santa'

If we look back, there may be some incidents in our life that some one was helping us.

We have to help others without embarrassing them. May be this is a good time to think about our attitude when we help some one in need. Do we look for publicity?

My prayers and best wishes

Raju Varghese Achen

Sermon by Priya Zachariah

Today we celebrate Jesus' 2nd miracle; the healing of the Leper. Leprosy was not only a major health problem, but also a social disease. In the Bible, it was widely believed that leprosy or any other type of illness was a curse from God and that only terrible sinners attract such terrible diseases. It was not only a physical death but also more importantly a spiritual death. That is why lepers were exiled. No one wanted to get the sickness, nor be associated with a "sinner." Society believed that they had no right to receive medical treatment or even be cared by a community. That ideology is contrary to the Christian belief. One of our sacraments is called "Unction of the Sick." This sacrament is a special prayer for the sick, and during this time, it is when the priest and the community reach out to help. Jesus comes in sets the precedent.

The leper's faith was great. And that is seen when he approaches Jesus and asks, "If you are willing, You can make me clean." First of all, it takes great courage and faith just to approach Jesus. Not many would, for if they did, then there would be a lot more accounts in the Bible of cured people. The leper's approach teaches us the way we must apply ourselves to Him; with an assurance of His power. Secondly, he says, "If you are willing." This indicates that the leper knows that he may not be made clean, but still asks with determination. Many pray to God, not realizing that what they ask for might not be His will; they don't realize that the answer isn't always 'yes.' So when we cannot be sure of his will, must be sure of his wisdom and mercy.

Great is God's mercy towards us. Jesus replies, "I am willing, be cleansed." First he reaches out to someone one when no one else would. He breaks the status quo. He crosses the social boundaries, and did without hesitation. Jesus made himself ritually unclean so that this leper maybe clean. Jesus is always doing that. That is a parallel to how He sacrificed himself on the Cross, in order that we maybe saved. Secondly, Jesus accomplished something no one else could. Lepers were sent to priest to be healed,

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for it was believed to be a spiritual ailment.

The priest did not have the ability to help this leper. However, Christ proved himself God, by recovering him from leprosy, and also showed that He is the Savior, for what the priests could not do, the Lord did it with ease and power.

The cure was a simple touch. Touching is a personal action; Jesus reached out to show that he cares. Another example is when God created the world with words, but crafted us with His own two hands, to show His love and care.

Mother Theresa is a modern example for what Jess did. Mother Theresa encountered a dying leprous man on the streets. He looked so sickly, and there was no one to take care of him. People on the streets ignored him, but Mother Theresa without hesitation, picked him up and carried him to her home. There she cleaned him and took care of him, and then he passed away peacefully. Such a powerful thing occurred, from one small simple touch, just like when Jesus healed the leper.

With His touch, with His cure, Jesus establishes that social status does not matter; He is willing to give help for those who ask.

Overall, the lessons to be learned are the God's mercy is great, and always to have great faith. Those who ask shall receive and everyone is equal under the eyes of God; never feel unworthy of God's love because of status.

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Bible Quiz Answers:

1. Aaron
2. Goliath
3. Tarsus
4. Abel
5. Book of Malachi
6. Queen of Sheba
7. St Stephen
8. Zacharias and Elizabeth
9. He kissed him so the soldiers could identify him
10. Genesis, Exodus, Levictius, Numbers and Deuteronomy

Bible Quiz

1. Who made the golden calf for the people to worship while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments? 2. What was the name of the Philistine giant who was slain by David? 3. Which town in Turkey was the birthplace of St Paul? 4. Who was the second son of Adam and Eve and whom his brother murdered? 5. Which book does the Old Testament end with which it repeats God's promise of the coming of the Messiah? 6. In the Bible, who was the Queen who questioned the wisdom of Solomon? 7. According to the Bible, who was the first Christian martyr? 8. Who were the parents of John the Baptist? 9. How did Judas Iscariot betray Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? 10. Name the first five books of The Bible. 11. In the Bible, what name did the Book of St John give to the great battle in which the last conflict between Good and Evil is to be fought? 12. Who were Daniel's three companions in the fiery furnace?

Sermon by Meril Pothén : The Paralytic Man (Mark 2:1-12)

Today's Lenten reading was taken from the book of St. Mark chapter two verses one through twelve. It tells the well-known story of a paralytic who, with the help of his four friends, was lowered through the roof of a home in Capernaum to be healed by Jesus. First of all, this story took place in Capernaum, a city located on the shore of Galilee which, according to Mathew 4:13, Jesus made His home after leaving Nazareth. In Capernaum, Jesus probably took residence in the home of Simon Peter, the eldest disciple, and most of Jesus' preaching in that town most likely happened in this house. Next, seated at the forefront of Jesus were, as Mark describes them, "scribes" and as Luke, in his parallel version of the story, says "Pharisees and doctors of law". These people who were sitting so close to Jesus were scrutinizing his every word, trying to find fault with what he said and what he did. Now, in the original Greek translation of this passage, the word that is translated in English to "preach" is "laleo" which means "to use words in order to declare one's mind and disclose one's thoughts", a dialog or debate. Jesus was not standing up in front of an audience and publicly spreading the word. Instead, he was casually sitting down and discussing it with these Pharisees, and their conversation is what had attracted this great multitude.

Now the story of the paralytic is one that has gained a reputable status in the Orthodox Church. It is taught to children in the pre-school and kindergarten age group and yet analyzed by scholars of various renown at seminaries. Its timeless simplicity has fascinated many and its morals of faith and determination live on. In these twelve short verses, Mark tells the story of a man suffering from paralysis who was carried by his four friends to Jesus, only to be deterred by the large multitude that had gathered in front of the house where Jesus was preaching. Determined to not be defeated by the crowd, the four men carried their friend to the roof of the house, made a hole in the roof, and gently lowered the ailing man to Jesus.

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Jesus, astounded by their great faith, heals the man saying, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." In this passage, there are three main relationships that deserve further explanation and analysis; the relationship between Jesus and the four men, Jesus and the paralytic, and Jesus and the Pharisees. Within these three connections lie the underlying points of perseverance and humility, the relationship between physical and spiritual well-being, and the Jesus's ability to surpass the limitations of a normal human being.

Firstly there is the relationship between Jesus and the four men who carried the paralytic. It is obvious, by their determination to bring this man to Jesus, that they were not hired servants but in fact the man's friends and maybe even relatives. These four came willingly, not on someone else's accord and brought with the passion and faith. What makes these four amazing is the way they were undeterred by huge roadblock of a crowd that encompassed the house, they simply found another way. They loved their ailing friend, they were persistent, they were creative, and they believed. Now one thing many people have wondered is how exactly these men were able to take apart the roof with their bare hands. In Capernaum and surrounding cities, most of the houses of the middle and low class had roofs made of sticks, leaves, and dirt, which made it quite easy to create a hole. A major point about the four men was their humility and determination to literally bring this person to God. In the same way we too should be this adamant when helping another on their path towards Christ. Like the obstruction faced by the four men, bringing a person to Jesus is filled with many obstacles but possessing humility and faith throughout the process will make the burden much lighter. This is the essence of the first relationship.

Next, there is the connection between Jesus and the subject of the story, the paralytic. In the Bible and especially during this time period, there was a huge stigma towards paralytics. As Priya said last week, people of this era believed that sickness was a punishment for sin. We now know that sickness is not directly caused by sin but more and more ongoing research is proving the undeniable connection between a person's physical and mental status. When this man came to Jesus, it may seem that he came because of his physical handicap. But, Jesus was able to see that he had come primarily because of his underlying sin, his somatic state taking a secondary position. He had faith that Jesus would be able to heal him of both justified by a bible verse taken from Psalms Chapter 103 verses two to three and twelve, "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; As far as the east is from the west, [so] far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*" Jesus in this passage did not blatantly say "you are healed" but instead, in verse five chooses to say "son, your sins are forgiven." By first addressing the man's spiritual handicap, Jesus shows that he wants to heal people in a holistic way, that is, by incorporating holiness. He believed that the mind should also be clean and by attacking

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the problem at the heart, all other branches would be taken care of as well. Friends, Christ shows us in the passage how important healing of the mind is.

We can find this healing by attending service, going to retreats, and above all, through confession. This story also shows God's willingness to forgive a person for anything they may have done. This should give us the confidence to approach God with a solemn and true heart for healing. In the same way, Jesus gives us an example of how we should behave with our fellow men. We, like Christ, should be willing to forgive not only our friends but also our enemies for anything.

The last relationship I would like to speak about is , the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees. Firstly, these Pharisees were present for find fault with Jesus and his teaching. They were taking every blow possible that they hoped would destroy his credibility. With all of these factors in place it is clear that they disliked Jesus and wanted to see him fail, especially with such a huge crowd watching. When he told the man that his sins were forgiven, the Pharisees were outraged and questioned within themselves why Jesus speaks such blasphemy, after all, no one can forgive sin other than God. Despite them reasoning this silently within themselves, Christ perceived in his Spirit their animosity and inquires why they reason such things. He then challenges the Pharisees by asking them which is easier, to tell a man his sins are forgiven or to tell a paralytic to take up their bed and walk. The trick here is both are easy to say, but both are equally beyond the abilities of a normal human being. When Jesus chose to tell the man to take up his bed and walk, he showed the Pharisees and all the bystanders that he was able to heal both the physical and spiritual ailments of the man. Additionally, Jesus brought himself down to the people's level to perform this miracle. Even in this day we hear people saying "give me proof, I won't believe you until I see it." Jesus knew men had this attitude so he chose to do what would make a visual difference, make a paralytic walk. He believed that if he simply told the man his sins were forgiven and left him as a paralytic, the people would doubt whether he has remised the person's sins at all. By choosing this mode, he proved that he was able to cure both the physical and spiritual side of the handicap.

Friends, these three relationships have each taught us something different about Christ, who he was, what he believed, and also, how to live our lives like Christ. Despite the passage's short length, it carries multiple important messages that we should all depart with. From Jesus and the four men we learn about perseverance, humility, and the difficult task of bringing a friend to God; from Jesus and the paralytic we see the important relationship between a spiritual and physical well being and the effectiveness of curing holistically, by going to the root of the ailment. Lastly, the relationship between Jesus un the Pharisees shows us how Jesus surpassed the capabilities of the average person, showing that he was not a normal human being but the Son of God and also, his versatility in evangelization, shown by bringing himself down to the people's level by performing the visually dramatic healing but also accommodating the stronger yet subtle spiritual cleansing. I encourage you all to take these messages which Christ has given us to heart

Parish News

Annual Retreat:

The Annual Retreat was held on March 8th. Fr Peter Paulose led the retreat which followed by confession. It was a real blessing for those who attended.

Catholicate Day:

Catholicate Day was celebrated on March 9th Sunday. Fr Dr. Raju Varghese emphasized the faith and traditions of the Church. Mr. Mathai Chacko read the Catholicate day pledge and all the members solemnly reaffirmed the pledge. At the end Catholica Mangala Ganam was sang by all offered special prayers led by Fr Raju Varghese.

Holy Week Services:

We had a very devine and spiritually filled holy week services with Evening prayers, confession, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, holy Saturday, and Easter services. The church extends its sincere appreciations to Fr. Raju Varghese, who was present all the time and led the services, Holy week coordinator Mr. John Jacob, Martha Mariam Samajam and Food Coordinators Mr. Jyothis Jacob and Jeemon Varghese, and also to the members for their services , participation in Vigil and other services and all the contributions of cash and kind.

April Prayer Meeting

Next monthly prayer meeting will be held at the residence of Mr. John Jacob , 735 Evans St, Paramus, New Jersey on Saturday April 26th at 6.00 PM. Every one please mark your calendar and plan to attend.

Martha Mariam Samajam

Martha Mariam Samajam elected new office bearers, Secretary Mrs Aleyamma Papen and Treasurer Mrs Rachel Abraham.

New Born:

A baby girl was born to daisy and Nixon Thomas and named her Angel.

Diocesan News:

Sunday School assigned competitions:

American Diocese will be conducting Drawing and Essay competitions for Sunday school students. Please check the Sunday school web site www.indianorthodoxsundayschool.org for details.

Family Conference:

The family and youth conference will be held from July 16 to 19. Please plan to attend. Registration form is available with the secretary Mr. Mathai Chacko.

Birthdays in March

Removed for privacy sake

Sermon : by Arun Zachariah

Today we are celebrating the first Sunday of the Great Lent. Today I will talk about Jesus' first miracle, as seen in John' chapter 2: verses 1-11. This miracle is commonly referred to as "The Wedding at Cana." In the following Sundays, we will discuss Jesus' other miracles and their profound impact.

But why discuss just his miracles? First off, a miracle is a marvelous wonder, that shouldn't happen under normal circumstances. A miracle is divine and usually happens in a time of need. Why do a Miracle? Many say Jesus did a miracle to show He is the Son of God. That maybe true, but importance of a miracle is to ease pain and suffering. In this case, the pain was the social shame. In the upcoming Sundays Jesus will ease the other pains such as leprosy, blindness, or being crippled. This is not surprising, because this is Jesus' nature. To help the suffering, using His divine power to help out anyway he can.

John chapter 2: verse1 reads, "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there." I would like to point out that there was little information about the wedding. The only thing we learned is the location and that it's a wedding. Why was Jesus even going there, whose wedding was it, how does Jesus know these people?

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But those details aren't really important, just the fact that the celebration was a wedding, is really significant.

Wedding is the celebration of marriage. Everywhere marriage is seen as Holy, a sacred institution, and in our church, marriage is one of the 7 sacraments. Obviously it's an honor to be invited to a wedding, to be able to partake in a crucial moment in the new couple's lives.

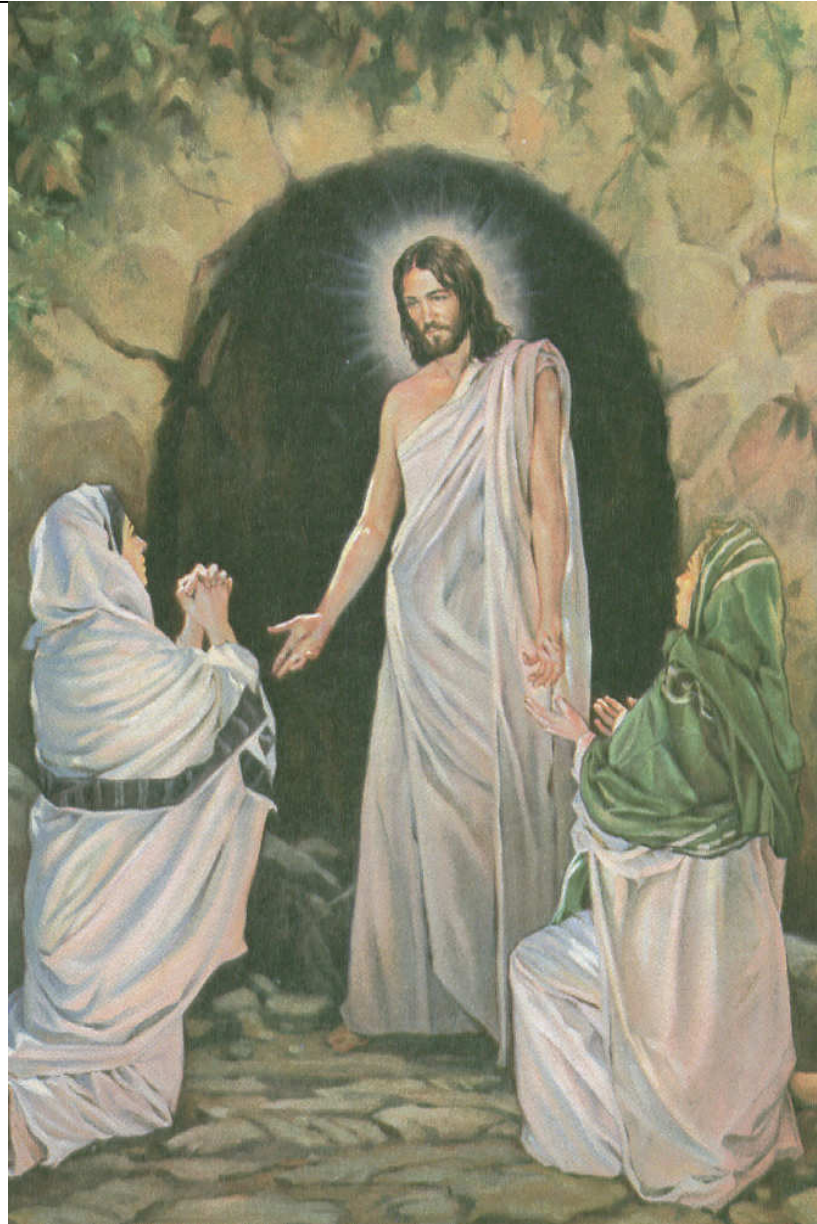
This miracle is both public and private, I will elaborate on that later. The second verse simply says, "Jesus and his disciples were invited." Notice that it says, "...and his disciples were invited." Just my own thoughts, but I feel that who ever invited Jesus had great extent of respect for him as something more than just Jesus, the human being. If the couple didn't, then why were the disciples specifically invited?

When they ran out wine, Jesus' mother said to him, "they have no wine." When this happens during a wedding back then, it is socially crippling. Why did Mary ask Jesus to do a miracle? Why didn't she ask a servant to get more wine? Mary asked Him, because she knew Jesus was the Son of God, because she was the first one to receive the message from God. She was 100% sure of his capabilities. Also, Mary didn't specifically ask him to do a miracle, but she knew He could help out. Remember, that this was His first ever miracle, no one ever knew He was capable of miracles. This shows great faith. Faith, simply, is believing without witnessing. So with great faith, Mary decided to go to Jesus not because he was her son, but the fact that he was the Son of God.

Jesus replies "Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not come yet." One important thing to call attention to is Jesus calling His mother "woman." In our culture, it is a crude thing to call your mother "woman." However back then, women was a dear way of saying lady, equivalent to "madam". But when Jesus calls Mary woman, he doesn't mean to be disrespectful, but is preparing her to stop thinking of Him as her son but rather as a Savior. "My hour has not come yet;" is referring to his crucifixion and is found several times in the book of John

One example would be found in John chapter 7: verse 30, "Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come." After Jesus agrees, Mary says to the servants, "Whatever he says to you, do it." Metaphorically it means that we as the children of God must also fully submit to God because he will guide us in a path of righteousness. The servants took six vessels, each able to hold up to 20 to 30 gallons. Next Jesus instructed the servants to fill them all up with water. Jesus then proceeded to turn the water into wine.

After this Jesus tells the servants to bring the wine to the "master of the feast/banquet." Which is just the head caterer. After the "master of feast/banquet" tastes it and he loves it. He either went to the bridegroom to complain or rejoice, about how he held onto the good wine, because an old tradition was to first serve the good wine and then the cheaper one. The point of this miracle is to make people understand that God loves each and every individual completely. Look at the pathetic situation, the wine meant for drinking ran out yet he still performed the mira-



Christ is Risen ! Indeed He Is Risen !!