

Two years ago or so, we acted out today's Gospel here at the parish: it was festival time and one of our members was hanging some speakers on the church roof. His foot went right through!

Well, speaking of the church, groundbreaking for our new church is only a few weeks away now, looks like the end of March. Things will be different: no more squinting at our hymnals here in church, no more occasionally replacing the duct tape that holds together the wall and floor--and in the Ventura Building--never again turning to God from the free throw line (which is what players do too, come to think of it).

And on Saturday afternoon, never again confessing our sins to Jesus....where? In the teachers' dining room. We are the only confessional in the Archdiocese with a refrigerator and microwave. If the line of penitents is really long, you can get something to eat!

In today's Gospel from Mark 2, there is no microwave or fridge, in fact not even a Reconciliation Room. *Just the most important words that most of us can ever hear: "your sins are forgiven."* And isn't it amazing that in the first gospel to be written, at the beginning of the second chapter, we already hear about a person who needs forgiveness? Even in the glory days of the early Church, when people were still alive who had seen Jesus, even then, sin was a problem!

"Your sins are forgiven." Dr. Phil cannot say that. Oprah cannot say that. The psychiatrist cannot say that. Our best friend cannot say that. Only Jesus Christ, who in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, does

forgive our sins *in a way we can see and hear and feel.*

The man is paralyzed, and what does Jesus offer him? Forgiveness of sins. For Jesus, a clean heart, a pure spirit, is the real miracle; getting up from the mat and walking home is a sign of the real healing.

Confessionals aren't so crowded these days, even the one with refrigerators. "I don't need to confess my sins to a human being," some folks say. Or, "a priest is no better than me." Or, "how could I ever look him in the eye again?" Or, "it's been so long, I forgot what to say." But maybe it's really this: "I am afraid that Jesus will not forgive me--because I cannot forgive myself."

One writer used these words and maybe spoke for lots of us: "the inner voice...which sometimes tells me: You don't deserve forgiveness or healing; you're hopeless. Nothing can heal you. Nobody but God could forgive you and he won't because you're so vile. God wants perfection, and a sinner like you hasn't a chance with Him...These are the voices that can keep me from knowing the love that is there...that can keep me from being healed."

Aren't we like the paralyzed man, unable to bring ourselves to Jesus? Maybe we should each line up four strong men to carry us into the Reconciliation Room! Meanwhile, we could listen again to the words of Isaiah in the first reading: "Remember not the events of the past...see, I am doing something new!...Your burdened me with your sins...It is I, I, who wipe out, for my own sake, your offenses, your sins I remember no more."

Lent is just ten days away. It could change our lives. There will be some special opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If the lines are really long, we do have the microwave and the refrigerator...