

HOMILY

## Faith That Moves God

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Friday of the First Week in Ordinary Time

Hebrews 4:1-5, 11; Psalm 78:4, 6-8; Mark 2:1-12

Knights of Columbus Headquarters, New Haven

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Photo by Fergal of Claddagh

I have never hauled a live human being up the wall of a house. I will go out on a limb and say you have never done so either. The real miracle of today's Gospel is that these four men did do just that. Leaving aside for the moment just *how* they could manage such a feat, the main question is:

Why? What would move these men to do such a thing?

Maybe it was this Gospel that inspired the Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney to found the Knights of Columbus. For what group of men in the Gospels better exemplifies the Knights' pillars of charity, unity, and fraternity than this awesome group of four?

Whenever I look at the Gospels, I cannot help but to do so as a dramatist. This is the scenario that makes sense to me:

- Maybe these four men were stonecutters; that would explain why they possessed the muscle to hoist the dead weight of the paralytic up to the roof of the house by main strength;

- For the longest time they have been inseparable friends;
- The paralyzed man was the leader of the group—the one who held them together through thick and thin;
- After work in the local quarry, they used to go swimming in the natural pool there;
- When they were hanging out relaxing, they would talk about all kinds of things. One day the topic turned to religion...and the discussion turned into an argument. The man who ended up becoming paralyzed was going through a faith crisis; circumstances were leading him to doubt God's existence; his last words to his friends were: "There is no God."
- Because after that they went swimming. But on that day they decided to try out diving into the quarry pool. That was when the man hit his head on the underwater rock and became paralyzed.

Who knows? But what we do know is that these four men never gave up on their paralyzed friend. And that was a huge commitment, especially in those days. For there was no medicine, no science, no welfare, no therapy to assist the man in his affliction. An invalid like him would have been rejected by society, or worse. The paralytic would never work again; he would have to be cared for by others for the rest of his life; never again would he be "productive" in any tangible way—rather, his lot was to be a blight on his community.

Yet, even though the paralyzed man could no longer move, the loyalty of these four for their friend was even more unmoved. They steadfastly refused to equate the value of the paralyzed man with his infirmity.

Why?

Because those four men were men of stalwart faith. Faith is a way of knowing! They saw in their friend something that went beyond his malady. Their faith told them that the unity which those four great friends shared was not something of their making. What brought them together...the bond that held them fast was not of their own invention. It was *given* to them. And if something that great had been given to them—not because they deserved it or earned it, but simply because Mercy had looked with compassion on them and drawn them together in fraternity—then maybe something *even greater* could be given to them, namely, the restoration of their friend's health. Because the miracle of such a healing was in no way greater than the miracle of the faith they possessed or of their friendship.

God would not give them that friendship just to have it undone because one of their number was sick. At the core of their faith was the certainty that their friend's life was not over. Rather, even his affliction was a way of bringing the four men closer to each other and to the One who was the cause of their faith.

Christ's presence in their village was an occasion for them to exercise their obedience. Filled with the certainty that comes from faith, they decided to get close to Him....literally.

Bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus was for the four the most *reasonable* thing they could do. They could not *not* bring him to Christ without in some way betraying their faith. Somehow in the Presence of Christ they would discover the reason for this difficult development in all their lives, and they would be given the strength to live out that reason in faith.

Even if nothing happened once they got there—even if the paralytic was not healed—maybe he would come to shed his doubts and believe that God exists: he would recognize Him in the fidelity of his friends. Because, apart from God, such an exorbitant, foolish, and even illegal action (breaking into someone's house) wouldn't make sense.

Otherwise, what is behind the words that Jesus speaks at the paralytic's healing: "Your sins are forgiven?" What has really paralyzed the man is his disbelief...his doubt...his rejection of God.

The point we need to realize is that the witness of such faith is so profound **that even God takes notice of it**. The Gospel says, "When Jesus saw **their** faith." The Lord is not moved so much by the pitiable sight of the paralyzed man as he is by the fervent display of faith of these four godly men. That faith propels Christ into action.

We must keep this in mind as we commemorate at this Mass the memory of Judge John Roll.<sup>†</sup> Perhaps the whole purpose of this holy man's life was to be present in that place of demonic darkness so that, by the witness of his life, the darkness would not be so dark...the designs of the Evil One would not win. Because this devout Knight of Columbus was present in a circumstance in which Hell vied to triumph, the Light of Christ was victorious instead. This mystery of the Christian faith goes right back to Our Lady on Calvary. Blessed John Paul II wrote, "Mary's sharing in the drama of the cross *makes this event more deeply human* and helps the faithful to enter into the mystery.... Mary's hope at the foot of the cross **contains a light stronger than the darkness** that reigns in many hearts." The same can be said of Judge Roll.

The point for us is this: Jesus Christ himself recognizes ardent, active faith; it moves our Lord to action; and when Christ acts, the world changes. Such faith will save the world.

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<sup>†</sup> Chief federal judge of the U.S. District Court of Arizona who was slain at the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords on January 8, 2011. [Editor]