

The Last Sunday of the Epiphany (February 19, 2012)

*“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”*

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Imagine the frustration and disappointment. Faithful friends bring a man to Jesus so that he may be healed of his paralysis, but Jesus doesn't seem all that concerned to meet the disabled man's needs. In fact, Jesus incites anger by those around him who consider Jesus to be presumptuously putting himself on a godly pedestal: “Son, your sins are forgiven,” says Jesus. They simply want Jesus to limit Himself to do what they want, to operate within the bounds of their own terms, to not upset the applecart. But God will not bow down to human expectations. Taking on the authority and loving

care of the Father, Jesus gives the paralyzed man—not what we want, but what he needs: “Son, your sins are forgiven.” And this is immediately met by anger and resentment. The physical healing which comes later is only to make visible the healing from within: it is a witness to the core concern of healing—healing of the soul.

God comes down to earth to dash expectations—first to be born in an animal stable, and to be of no reputation. Jesus is not the Messiah we wanted, or else we would not have killed Him. He frustrates the desires of men and women, doing so with the intent of reforming those desires according to His own. He wants to teach us to truly say and to truly pray, “thy will be done.” Our stubborn willfulness, however, leads to our

frustrated wills, which leads us to our self-destruction. We have expectations of how things are to unfold, and this is where we run into serious trouble. We are okay with God doing His thing, as long as it does not upset the way we want things to unfold. It is by our lack of faith that we refuse to trust that the Lord's will for us is good: "For in [Jesus] every one of God's promises is a 'Yes,'" says St. Paul. God's ways, even though they often contradict our own ways—and perhaps precisely because they do often contradict us—are positive and good for us. Paul continues: "For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen,' to the glory of God." When we say "Amen" to the will of God, we are saying "Yes" to ourselves as well. And here is the

paradox: By saying "No" to ourselves we say "Yes" to ourselves.

But this is easier said than done, and takes much spiritual reformation on our part if we are to do this. Many of those following Jesus walked away from Him in order to find softer and easier teachings, because they found Jesus so difficult. When we find our wills thwarted, our temptation is to do the same: to walk away from the challenge and to find something that tell us—not what we need to hear, but what we want to hear. And we allow our spiritual growth to be stunted.

Through Isaiah, the Lord says: "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" Forget the way things used to be—forget

the past. Can you see the new life blossoming in your midst? In the past we lived one way, but in new times we are given new direction. And to live the new life it means we must, as St. Paul teaches, die daily to ourselves which are conditioned in the old ways of being and doing. This is the point of Lent, which we are about to enter into. We must lose ourselves in order to find ourselves, we must die in order to live. If we will do this, we shall embrace the God who wills to do a new thing within us and among us, and so reform His people and reform His Church, so that we may finally rally around Him, and Him alone.

*Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, both now and for evermore.*

*Father A. E. Nussey*