

Year B Seventh Sunday Ordinary Time
Feb. 22, 2009
Is 43:18-19, 21-22, 24b-25; Ps 41; 2 Cor 1:18-22; Mk 2:1-12

We once again have to discuss a passage from the second part of Isaiah the prophet, our first reading. His audience are the Jews in exile in Babylon, where their sins have taken them. The second part of Isaiah is called the Book of the Consolation of Israel: to them is proclaimed the Good News that exile is over, something which was only possible when sins were forgiven and consciences thus purified could again (or perhaps, for the first time!) be on intimate terms with the Lord; see Heb 9:13-14.

“Second Isaiah” speaks of the redemption of Israel from exile as a new creation. It is also a new exodus, only much better than the first exodus from Egypt. Now, in the new exodus, the desert will blossom with springs, the path will be smooth, nothing will harm the returnees. They shall not hunger or thirst, and the very hills will cheer them on, Is 49:8-15. Such were the images that the people of Israel had with which to envision their salvation, when God finally came to “visit” them (Lk 1:68; 7:16).

Estrangement from God due to sin is not unrelated to illness. We are embodied souls, and “psychosomatic” refers to both, *psyche* is soul and *soma* is body. This is reflected in the psalm, where the one on his sickbed acknowledges that he has sinned. Some, like the man born blind, did not sin, Jn 9:1-3, others suffer mishaps through no fault of their own, Lk 13:1-5, but the paralytic near the pool of Bethesda was warned by Jesus to sin no more “lest something worse” happen to him Jn 5:14.

Again, our gospel reading has every mark of historicity. A paralytic is lowered through the roof due to the crowd around Jesus, and Jesus both restores his health and forgives his sins (being cured and being forgiven can be synonymous, as comparing Is 6:10 and Mk 4:12 shows). Jesus manifests his “power” to forgive by manifesting his power to heal. The word “power” here (translated “authority” in our reading) is very special. It is really the “dominion” given to the Son of man in Dn 7:14 (three times!), the same dominion over evil manifested by Jesus in Mk 1:22, 27. It is the dominion of the Son to give his life and take it up anew, Jn 10:18. Matthew places the word on Jesus’ lips at the end of his gospel, Mt 28:19. It was something newer than even Isaiah imagined.