

A man was seen fleeing down the hall of the hospital just before his operation. A security guard stopped him before he could leave the hospital and asked, "What's the matter?"

The man said, "I heard the nurse say, 'It's a very simple operation, don't worry, I'm sure it will be all right.'"

"She was just trying to comfort you," said the security guard. "What's so frightening about that?"

"She wasn't talking to me," exclaimed the man. "She was talking to the doctor!"

People are at times afraid of doctors. Perhaps it is because they wonder, "does he or she really know what they are doing?" Or it might be, the doctor is going to discover something about our health that will require lifestyle changes to lower the cholesterol and bring the blood pressure into a safe range.

When it comes to the doctor of our soul, Jesus Christ, we can see many people flee the building, assured that they do not need or want Jesus. This might be because they do not know they even have a soul in need of the physician's healing care. Jesus cannot do anything with this kind of attitude. That is why in today's Gospel he says:

***I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance***

To understand this statement, it is helpful to know that in Luke's telling of the Gospel that immediately before today's story there is the story of the paralytic who is brought to Jesus by his four friends. Luke by joining these stories together is teaching us something about what it means to be a sinner.

A sinner is like a paralytic in God's presence. The Lord wants to free us of our paralysis, forgiving us our sins and enabling us to walk by giving us grace once more. In the sacrament of Penance, if Jesus Christ "sees us cold, unwilling, rigid perhaps with the stiffness of a dying interior life, he wants to touch us with his healing grace. We can leave confession hearing Jesus say to us:

***'I say to you, my friend, Arise and walk' and leave that narrow life which is no life at all'***<sup>1</sup>

Luke then tells us the story of Matthew as representative of someone who was healed of the paralysis of greed and extortion characteristic of his tax practice and becomes a man who generously opens his home to all who want to hear and see Jesus. Matthew, responds generously and promptly to the call from Jesus.

To celebrate and to show how appreciative he is for his new life and vocation of following Jesus he gives a banquet. This passage of the Gospel shows us that a vocation to follow Jesus is something about which we should be very grateful and happy. If we see it only in terms of renunciation and giving things up, and not as a gift from God and something which will enhance us and redound to others' benefit, we can easily become depressed, like the rich young man who, not wanting to give up his possessions, went away sad (cf. Lk 18:18ff). Matthew believes in quite the opposite way, as did the Magi who, "when they saw the star, rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (Mt 2:10) and who gave much more importance to adoring the new-born God than to all the inconveniences involved in travelling to see him.

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<sup>1</sup> St J. Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 93).

Since this is how Jesus operates, the only way we can be saved is by admitting before God, in all simplicity, that we are paralysed sinners daily in need of his grace and healing touch.

St Jose Maria Escriva applies this passage this way:

***“Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice. That is how he reigns in the soul”<sup>2</sup>***

And here is the point, we all need to be cured of our spiritual paralysis – but not everyone can admit this. Those who do, will not be fleeing from Jesus but drawing ever closer to us and will experience more deeply the poetic beauty of Isaiah’s words in our own souls”

***If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;  
if you call the sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;  
if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;  
14 then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;  
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken<sup>3</sup>***

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<sup>2</sup> (St Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ Is Passing By*, 181).

<sup>3</sup> The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition. (1993). (Is 58:13–14). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.