

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

(Matthew 9: 1-8)

(*Poem*, Vol. 1, pp. 338-40; *Gospel* Vol. 9, pp. 408-10)

(Jesus says:) 'Simon, I am going into your house. You will all go and tell the people that I am back and then bring Me the sick ones.' [...]

Jesus begins to speak. In the front row, there are five... high-ranking people, who have elbowed their way through the crowd taking advantage of the fear they strike into poor people. Their sumptuous garments and their pride denounce them as Pharisees and doctors. [...]

'Master!' shouts Peter amidst the crowd, 'the sick people are here. Two of them can wait until You come out, but this one is crushed amongst the crowd and... he cannot stay here any longer. It is impossible for us to come in. Shall I send him back?'

'No, lower him down through the roof.'

'You are right. We will do that at once.'

I can hear them shuffling on the low roof of the big room, the terrace of which is not built of cement, as the store-room is not really part of the house. The roof is formed with branches covered by chips of stone like slate. I do not know what stone it is. They make an opening through which, by means of ropes, they lower down the little stretcher on which the patient is lying. It is lowered in front of Jesus. The crowds throng closer to see.

'Both you and who brought you have great faith.'

'Oh! Lord! How could we have no faith in You?'

'Well, I say to you: son (he is a very young man) your sins are forgiven.'

The man looks at him, crying... perhaps he is somewhat disappointed because he was hoping to be cured in his body. The Pharisees and doctors whisper something to one another turning up their noses, foreheads and mouths in disdain.

'Why are you muttering, more in your hearts than with Your lips? According to you, it is easier to say to the paralytic: "Your sins are forgiven" or "Get up, take your little bed and walk away"? You think that only God can forgive sins. But you cannot answer which of these things is greater, because this man, whose whole body is lost to him, has spent a lot of money without being cured. And he can only be cured by God. Now, that you may learn that I can do everything, that you may learn that the Son of man has authority both over bodies and souls, on the earth and in Heaven, I say to him: "Get up. Pick up your bed and walk. Go home and be holy".'

The man jerks, he shouts, stands up, he throws himself at Jesus' feet, kisses and caresses them, he cries and laughs, and his relatives and the crowd do likewise. The crowd divides into two to let him pass, as if he were triumphant, and they follow him rejoicing. The five resentful men go away, conceited and as stiff as sticks.
