

This is Gospel passage offers a wonderful opportunity for reflection. We can start by looking at the paralytic. At times we all get paralyzed and just can't move. Sometimes it's fear of the unknown that freezes us in place. Sometimes it's grief that plunges us into darkness so deep that we can't think. Sometimes it's anger or an old grievance that steals life and energy from us and leaves us dead in the water.

Whatever its cause, spiritual paralysis is something everyone experiences at some time in life. And so this gospel can have such a powerful lesson for us. The paralyzed man needed healing, in body and spirit. But he couldn't move; he couldn't get to Jesus. So his friends did for him what he couldn't do for himself: They carried him to the place where he could be healed. They made an opening in the roof and carefully lowered him into Jesus' presence! And Jesus did the rest.

It's a perfect model for what we need to do for one another. When our friends hit a time of paralysis — from grief, fear, or whatever, we can pick them up and, ever so gently, carry them spiritually to a 'place' — not a physical but a spiritual place — where healing can happen and their future can be re-imagined. We can help make an opening to a new road. It's holy work, God's work, to carry our brothers and sisters when they can't walk on their own.

Think how often God has done that for us: Carried and carried us until at last we're ready to receive his healing. There's only one way we can ever thank God for that: By carrying one another as he has carried us, helping our friends and family find the openings into grace and healing.

I think what makes this faith community so vibrant are the many ways that we help one another; the many way we bring others to Jesus. Through the Consolation ministries we bring the healing

presence of Jesus to those who have lost a loved one. Our Eucharistic ministers bring the presence of Jesus to the homebound. The Elizabeth Ministry brings the presence of Jesus to families during the joys, trials, and sorrows of the childbearing years. Our RCIA team invites those outside our faith community to find his presence in and through the Catholic faith. The Secular Franciscans and those who volunteer at the Master's Table or Catholic Social Services or Interfaith Hospitality or in the Kairos Prison Ministry are bringing the presence of Jesus to those in need. And in so many other ways people in this parish are bringing others into the presence of Jesus.

Yet, we are still nowhere close to the fullness of God's reign. So praise God that once again the season of Lent is upon us. May it be a time of spiritual renewal for all of us. I hope my top ten list of suggestions for Lent will help you grow closer to presence of Jesus in your life.

#10. Lent is a time to pray and listen to God's Spirit. So, take time to visit the Adoration Chapel. Start by thanking God for the things you are grateful in life and then be still and listen to the promptings that God has placed in your heart.

#9. Lent is a time to clear away the clutter. The messes in our homes or workplaces can reflect a messiness in our hearts. Put things in order and donate the things you don't need to Catholic Social Services.

#8. Lent is a time for developing new spiritual exercises. The best practice is daily Mass. But if that is not a possibility, think about reading the Bible or a book on spirituality everyday or make a commitment to Friday night Stations of the Cross. God uses many means to tell to us about his love for us.

#7. Lent is a time for making little sacrifices. Giving up small pleasures toughens us up for bigger struggles later. So skip dessert. Give up the beer or candy. Spend less time online. You'll find you have more strength to break bad habits or take on new and good habits.

#6. Lent is a time to wake up to life. So, fast from TV. Stop vegging out in front of the tube. I promise you will really not miss much.

#5. Lent is time to realize a communion of Saints surrounds us. Learn about your patron saint. Pray through the intercession of your patron saint, who will help you through the stormy times of life.

#4. Lent is a great time to fast from gossip. It's easy to spread information about others that makes them look bad. For the next 40 days avoid listening to gossip and refuse to pass it on.

#3. Lent is a time to be aware of how terribly materialistic we are. So, try spending less money. Buy only the essentials during Lent and give the savings to the poor.

#2. Lent is a time for reconciliation. So, prepare for the Sacrament of Confession by approaching someone you have hurt and asking them to forgive you. The basic gospel call is for us to love one another. Our Lenten Penance Service will be on March 6th. Mark the date on your calendar now.

#1. And from today's Gospel my number one Lenten suggestion is to carry someone's cross. Just as his

friends carried the paralytic to Jesus, offer to help a neighbor, family member, or co-worker with a problem they are struggling with. If such an offer doesn't lead you deeper into the mystery of God's love, little else will. Amen! Amen!