



Archdiocese of San Antonio
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**Homily for Southwest Liturgical
Conference**

January 15, 2016

At every liturgical celebration we stand, in a sense, at a fork in the road. Do we turn to the right or to the left? I am not suggesting these as political or ideological choices but, rather, as religious decisions: Do we move closer toward God and our neighbor or further away from them? We have to decide this each day to guide our prayer, our thoughts, and our actions.

Today's first reading is a prophetic, anti-monarchical warning about what is involved in preferring a human king over God's sovereignty. Samuel describes precisely the kind of king Solomon later became and the impacts this will have on the people's lives. It also hints at the disasters that

followed over the next four hundred years. So, the first choice we face in choosing which path to follow is: Who will be the Lord of our lives? This is a fundamental choice we have to make – not only in the annual renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter, but every day of our lives. The word of God urges us to move closer to God. Only then will we be able to respond: “Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord!” The Lord is “our shield, the Holy One of Israel, our King!” *Viva Cristo Rey!*

Today’s gospel invites us to join Jesus in Capernaum, to become part of the crowd listening attentively to Jesus within the home, to identify with the paralytic’s friends who bring him for healing, or to see ourselves as the paralyzed person let down through the roof to encounter the Lord directly.

Who is the paralytic? A sinner like each of us ... a sinner like Pope Francis who identifies himself foremost as a

sinner. Jesus's words are very familiar to us, but let us be the paralytic just now and hear those powerful words in our hearts. Jesus realizes that the man's real problem is sin, infidelity. God is merciful, compassionate. He loves each of us totally and unconditionally. The paralytic may have expected only physical healing, but the encounter with Jesus heals his soul and spirit before healing his body.

The passage says clearly that God forgives and Jesus has the authority to forgive sins – as well as to heal. Note also that Jesus recognizes the faith of the friends who bring the paralytic and responds by addressing the paralyzed person. Let us learn from the faith of these friends. While we, too, need to be healed of our infidelities, we also need to give witness to our faith in the Lord Jesus and his gospel to all whom we encounter. Miracles can happen when we do this! We ourselves are not the Lord, but we can bring people to Jesus.

You have been focusing on the role of liturgy in evangelization. Today's readings from the Word of God remind us that we have first to be evangelized ourselves – over and over again – to make fundamental decisions about how we conduct our lives every day. Then in faith we need to reach out to others, especially the most vulnerable – not to judge others as sinners or to pressure them into joining us in the community of faith --- but, first, to bring healing to their lives by the way we encounter them with mutual respect, ready to listen to their story, to accompany them on a journey to healing or wholeness or simply to provide a refuge or oasis where they can be safe, respected, and loved. Pope Francis has called us to this fullness of evangelization every day of his Petrine ministry. It is not enough to marvel at his words and gestures; we must integrate his attitudes and willingness to serve others into our daily lives. We are at a fork in the road – will we move

closer to God and neighbor or farther away from them?

Decide now! Choose life!