

**Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(Feb. 22, 2009)**

He's My Brother

Back in 1924, too far back for anyone here to remember, a journalist named Roe Fulkerson wrote a story about an encounter he had had. One day walking along a street he met what he called a spindly and physically weak lad, carrying a baby and staggering toward a neighborhood park. The journalist tells how he approached the boy and said to him, "Pretty big load for such a small kid." The boy simply looked at him and responded with a phrase that has become famous and which you have all heard and seen many times. He said, "He ain't heavy. He's my brother."

The phrase was adopted in the 1940s by Fr. Edward Flanagan, founder of Boys (and now) Girls Town, which was originally started as a boys' orphanage and which cares for at-risk children today.

"He ain't heavy" was expanded into a lyric and set to music that actually became a hit in 1969. What started as a headline developed into an expression of love: "The road is long with many a winding turn that leads us to who knows where, who knows where. But I'm strong, strong enough to carry him. He ain't heavy, he's my brother. So on we go, his welfare is my concern. No burden is he to bear; we'll get there, for I know he would not encumber me; he ain't heavy, he's my brother."

Our Gospel passage today tells us about four men whose burden was their brother, their friend, whom they perhaps carried along a road that was long, with many a winding turn, but it brought them right to where they wanted to go. It brought them to Jesus. They had trouble getting near him but they found a creative way to solve that problem. Imagine the surprise of the crowd, perhaps of Jesus also, when they saw that bed coming down through the ceiling and landing right at the feet of Jesus.

Jesus saw their action for what it was. Mark tells us it was their faith, *their* faith, not just the faith of the paralytic but the faith of his friends as well. It tells us something about what can happen when people together go to the Lord with faith. Miracles can happen. Jesus' immediate response is, "Your sins are forgiven." Well that's not what they came to hear. But Jesus wants to let them know that spiritual healing is more important than

physical healing. But he also wants to let them know that it's just as easy to say "Get up and walk as to say your sins are forgiven." Why? Because the power of God is at work in him.

Well, the Gospel challenges us in many ways. I offer these to you as food for thought as we begin the Lenten season this week. What might they mean to you as far as your Lenten practices are concerned? First of all how far are we willing to go to share one another's burdens? How creative can we be in finding ways to alleviate the sufferings of others? What might our faith be calling us to do?

Certainly one of the challenges is to be forgiving. We can all forgive those who have hurt us in some way and we can ask for their forgiveness. But we all find that a difficult thing to do. I'm sure Jesus understood that. That's why he tells us many times, "Forgive!" He teaches us to pray, "Forgive us as we forgive others." And he gives us the supreme example from the cross, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Well, if you want a penance during this season of penance, try that.

Here's something else I'll recommend: Go home today, get out your Bible, open it to Chapter 12 of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Read it, read it again, ponder it, pray over it. Do that every single day during this season of Lent and listen, listen closely to what God might be saying to you. Romans 12, don't forget.