

I always imagine this gospel story as a comedy. Four guys from the same fraternity have a friend named Seymour, injured in a freak sports accident. They hear that a healer has arrived at a neighbor's house. They pick up Seymour on his mat and haul him over there, as if they were delivering a Persian rug, but they can't get in. Too many people are blocking their way. So the guys look at each other, and one of them, Wild Willy, gets a zany idea. "Let's do this," Willy says. "Let's tie Seymour to the mat, put ropes on the four corners, grab the ends, climb the outside of the house, and haul Seymour up to the roof." Seymour, who cannot move his arms or legs, opens his eyes as wide as he can. Willy goes on. "Then we'll dig a hole in the roof over the place where Jesus is speaking, and we'll drop Seymour right down in front of him!" The guys go, "Yeah!" Seymour goes, "Un-un. Un-un." But it's too late, they scurry off to get the ropes and tie him up. They crawl up the side of the house, banging Seymour a few times against the wall. When they get to the top, they go to work on the roof. Meanwhile, down below, Jesus is preaching about the kingdom of God, loving your neighbor, and some parable about wheat when he notices debris is falling on his shoulder. He looks up. Everyone looks up, and they see – it looks like the house has just given birth to a large mammal struggling with four umbilical cords that jerks down to the floor. Jesus looks down. He sees Seymour. He looks up, and through the hole in the roof, he sees Willy and his buds high-fiving each other and rubbing their hands in anticipation of what Jesus will do next. Jesus looks down at Seymour, shrugs his shoulders, and says to him, "Your sins are forgiven." Dead silence. Then a cry rings from the rafters: "That's not what we came for." Eventually Jesus does what they came for, but first he does what he came for – he came for the forgiveness of sins. That is the first thing on his mind, no matter the circumstances.

When we come to Jesus with our requests, we hope he will do what we came for, but sometimes he comes for something else. If we want our requests to be heard, we have to acknowledge not just the sickness of our bodies, or the weakness of our relationships, or of our abilities to pass a test or complete a task. We also have to acknowledge another kind of sickness: a sickness of the spirit, a sickness we call sin. Jesus will be more open to our other requests if we first acknowledge our faults and seek his mercy.

We cannot do this alone. What good friends this paralytic had! Don't we all want friends who will go the extra mile to help us in our times of need? We have such friends: We have Sunday mass, the bible, and the sacraments of the Church; we have the example of other believers; we have religious education and opportunities for service. We have many good friends who can lift us up when we feel down, and bring us back to Jesus, whose mercy breaks through any obstacle.

Lent begins this week. The reason we give things up is to help overcome our sins. If we acknowledge our sin and rely on our friends, this season will bring us to Jesus, and he will heal us his way. If we do what he asks, he will do what he came for.