Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic because of the faith of the people who brought him in on a stretcher. To help the skeptical scribes, Jesus goes the extra mile and heals the man’s paralysis as well. “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”— he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home” (Mt 9:6).

Faith is required for the forgiveness of our sins as well. When a person is baptized, we ask them about what they believe. “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?” So, with the faith present and professed, an adult (or child 7 or older) is baptized and receives the forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus draws the connection between baptism, faith and the forgiveness of sins when he commissions the Eleven Apostles: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:15-16). In this Gospel passage from Mark, the laying on of hands for the curing of the sick is a sign that will accompany those who believe. The laying on of hands is part of the Church’s ritual for the anointing of the sick where sins are also forgiven (CCC 976-77).

Better yet, in the church, we have the gift of sacramental confession. It requires faith and courage to bare our souls before our loving God through the ministers he has chosen to offer the sacrament of peace. I am reminded of Cardinal Dolan’s story about the man who was as skeptical about Padre Pio as the scribes were about Jesus.¹

Anthony survived the horrors of World War II. In 1945, some of his fellow soldiers invited him to attend Padre Pio’s early morning Mass. Anthony was a fallen away Catholic and very cynical about the stories that had grown around the mystic friar. After the Mass, his buddies wanted to talk with Padre Pio.

Anthony explains “I was not impressed at all. These other guys were nervous and fawning all over him. None of that for me! So, when Padre Pio got to me, I taunted him. ‘Show me your wounds!’” Padre Pio wrapped his hands and feet to cover the stigmata, the wounds of Jesus where his hands and feet were pierced by nails on the cross. Fueled by his own disbelief, he challenged Padre Pio a second time. “Show me those wounds!”

Padre Pio returned the favor. Smiling at Anthony, he replied, “Show me your wounds!” Anthony only grew more obstinate. “I looked back at him and said, ‘What are you talking about? I don’t claim to have these wounds like you do! Show me your wounds!’”

Padre Pio whispered to Anthony that in the sacrament of confession, he could show him his wounds. Anthony elaborates: “And with that, he led me over to the confessional, and I poured my guts out to him, ‘cause I sure had a lot of sins, a lot of wounds.” Anthony’s confession helped him to walk in his faith again.

As the story unfolds, we see that were it not for his friends who brought him to see Padre Pio, Anthony would have remained paralyzed from the sins. He lacked the faith, but his friend’s faith put him in contact with the healing power of Christ in the person of the saintly Padre Pio.

Anthony returned home from World War II healed of all of the wounds deeply buried in his soul. And in time, he was able to freely tell his story to others … that they too might show their wounds to a priest in confession and hear the healing words of Jesus: “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.”

¹ cardinaldolan.org/index.php/what-god-has-joined-together-man-must-not-divide/