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A Year of the Lord Liturgical Bible Studies

Volume 4: Easter to Pentecost

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Department of Religious Education

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Chapter 4 Sunday of the Paralytic

Prayer

Sing: *Christos Anesti* (Christ is Risen)

Merciful Christ, Creator of all, You came to earth to heal the sick. By Your word You raised up the paralyzed man at the pool near the Sheep Gate. You cured the woman with the flow of blood. You showed mercy to the daughter of the Canaanite woman possessed by an evil spirit. You healed the servant of the centurion. You opened the eyes of Bartimaeus. You are the physician of our souls and bodies. Therefore, we praise You: almighty Lord, glory to You!

— Adapted Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Paralytic

Sing: *Christos Anesti* (Christ is Risen)

Do You Want to Get Well?

The Evangelist John, a soaring eagle lifted up by the Spirit, was able to capture the divine grandeur of Christ. John's account of Jesus's ministry reads like a continuous transfiguration. Christ is the fullness of the grace and truth. He is the shepherd, the gate, and the vine. He is the

life, the light, and the resurrection. Because He is the resurrection. He raises Lazarus from the dead (ch. 11). Because He is the light, he opens the blind man's eyes (ch. 9). Because He is the life, He gives fullness of life to the paralyzed man at the pool by the Sheep Gate (ch. 5).

The hymnbook of the period Easter to Pentecost is called the *Pentecostarion*. The Pentecostarion is a liturgical treasure containing hundreds of hymns which recount Christ's great acts of mercy and which glorify Him. The Sundays and the entire week following each Sunday are known by the New Testament events they commemorate: the "Week of the Paralytic," the "Week of Thomas," the "Week of the Myrrh-bearers," and so on.

Here are some examples of hymns from the Week of the Paralytic that dramatize Jesus's encounter with the paralyzed man:

The paralytic, an unburied dead man, upon seeing You cried out: "Lord, have mercy on me! My bed has become my grave. Of what use is my life? ...But I come to You, the fountain of healing, that I may say together with the almighty Lord, glory to You!"

– Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Paralytic

At the pool near the Sheep Gate a man lay in sickness. Seeing You, Lord, he cried out: "I have no man to put me in the pool when the water is stirred!" ...And the Savior, moved by compassion said to him: "For you I became man; for you I took on flesh – and you say I have no man? Take up your bed and walk!"

– Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Paralytic

Lord, it was not the pool that healed the paralytic, but Your word. The power of Your voice was stronger than the chronic bond of the disease. Therefore he cast away the burden of sickness and took up his bed as a witness to Your abundant mercies. Lord, glory to You!

– Hymn of Praises, Sunday of the Paralytic

Those paralyzed with envy and mighty in evil, seeing the power of signs and wonders, did not believe that You are the Son of God and sovereign of all. But You healed the paralytic by Your word!

– Hymn of Praises, Monday of the Paralytic

Lord, the paralytic fulfilled with gladness the command of Your almighty, sovereign power. He took up his bed and carried it on the Sabbath. Bearing testimony to You, he cried out: He who healed me commanded me to do so!

– Hymn of Praises, Tuesday of the Paralytic

Read John 5:1–15, the Gospel reading for the Sunday of the Paralytic.

Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem (verse 1)?

How long had the paralyzed man been sick (verse 5)? _____

What did Jesus ask him (verse 6)?

Why did the authorities object to the healing (verse 10)?

What did Jesus tell the healed man (verse 14)?

1. Read again the above hymns for the Week of the Paralytic. What did you find striking in these hymns? Why?

2. Why do you think Jesus asked the paralytic, who had been sick for thirty-eight years, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6)

Meditation

Jesus was always looking for a response from those He addressed. He probed below the surface to test the desire, to find hope, to awaken faith. "Listen, then, if you have ears" (Matthew 13:9)! "Ask and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7)!

A parent can do so much for a child; the child also has to respond to parental care. A teacher can do so much to challenge a student; the student also has to respond to the challenge of learning. A nation can do so much for their citizens; they also have to respond to the nation's leadership, laws and programs. But so it is also with God and people. God's love is always seeking love. God seeks to find us through Christ, the Church, other people, nature, and through particular incidents in our lives. Nothing can happen if we ourselves do not respond, do not stir out of our lethargy, do not reach out to Him in personal faith.

Jesus Christ Makes You Well!

"Jesus Christ makes you well!" (Acts 9:34), Peter said to Aeneas, a man from Lydda, and at once Aeneas got up. These words of the apostle Peter parallel Jesus' command to the paralyzed man: "Get up and walk!" (John 5:8) Jesus's saving words and works continued in the words and works of the apostles.

What assurance of faith, what divine authority, lie behind these words! Jesus and the apostles were men of mountain-moving faith, men full of the inner power of the Holy Spirit. They could call upon God's power with the great faith and the joyous confidence to heal. They liberated people from sickness and the burden of sin.

What a moment of divine glory to see a person stand up and walk – free in his or her physical movements. It is an even greater moment of divine glory when we see a person healed from inner paralysis – free at last in his or her spiritual self and energized by the grace of God.

Have you seen spiteful, compulsive, angry, or empty people? Have we not ourselves acted with bitterness, hatred, and sometimes despair? For what reason? Isn't it simply because evil, sinful passions, and darkness take control of our hearts? We are shackled by many bonds of sinful habits, and cannot feel relate to others with love, joy, kindness, patience, and a forgiving spirit.

The two men healed by Jesus and the apostle Peter were bed-ridden for many years. They no doubt experienced moments of lowliness, resentment, and depression. But the light of God shone upon them and they were freed from the prison of physical and spiritual paralysis. Christ is always there, always caring, always ready to help us. We need but turn to the physician of bodies and souls and we receive astounding healings.

Read Acts 9:32–42, the Epistle for the Sunday of the Paralytic.

Who did Peter visit, according to verse 32? _____

What resulted from healings such as that of Aeneas (verse 35)?

How did Tabitha or Dorcas spend her time (verse 36)?

What evidence is given of her work in verse 39? The widows showed Peter all _____

1. Describe Tabitha in your own words.

2. In what way was Tabitha liberating the widows by her work and witness?

3. How might you help another person be liberated from paralyzing conditions such as loneliness or guilt today? Be specific.

Meditation

You understand what it means to be lonely, Lord. You experienced a most agonizing moment of loneliness when You called out that terrible question from cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” You experienced aloneness when You were forsaken by Your disciples at the crucifixion. By Your aloneness on the Cross You broke down the barrier of sin and destroyed our loneliness. As You broke the aloneness of the paralytic in today’s Gospel, so come and break our aloneness today that we may keep reaching out in love to destroy the painful loneliness of those who sit alone on park benches and bar stools, in movie theaters and cocktail parties. Having found the ultimate cure for loneliness in our surrender to You, may we reach out to bring this same divine companionship to others, helping them break out of their tombs of self-pity and self-centeredness to find in You life’s greatest joy.

– Anthony Coniaris, *The Message of the Sunday of the Gospel Readings*, vol. 2, p. 52

Mid-Pentecost

The special feasts celebrated on Wednesday of the Week of the Paralytic is known as a “Mid-Pentecost.” This Wednesday is the mid-point between Easter and Pentecost. The Feast of Mid-Pentecost liturgically unites and connects the two great feasts.

The symbol of water provides the theme for the Feast of Mid-Pentecost. “Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink.’ As the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.’ Jesus said this about the Spirit which those who believed in Him were going to receive” (John 7:37–38). This passage is also part of the Gospel reading for the Sunday of Pentecost.

Anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit by Christ, the Dismissal Hymn of Mid-Pentecost expresses the yearning of the believer with these words:

*At the mid-point of the Feast, O Savior, quench my thirsty soul with the waters of piety.
For to all You cried out: whoever thirsts, let him come to me and drink! Christ our God,
the source of life: glory to You! (Dismissal Hymn, Mid-Pentecost)*

Read John 7:14–30, which is the Gospel reading for Mid-Pentecost.

Who is the source of Jesus’s teaching (verse 16)? _____

Who will know that Jesus’s teaching comes from God (verse 17)?

What miracle does Jesus mean in verses 21 and 23b?

Why couldn't Jesus's enemies seize Him (verse 30)?

1. Discuss the symbolism of water. What are the qualities and uses of water? How is water used in the sacraments and services of the Church?

2. Discuss the symbolism of thirst. For what does the earth thirst? For what do you really thirst?

Meditation

Our hearts are restless until they find rest in God.

– St. Augustine

Prayer

Sing: *Christos Anesti* (Christ Is Risen)

Jesus my God, You hold creation in Your hand, reigning over all with the Father and the Spirit. But You appeared in the flesh healing our diseases and cleansing our sinful passions. Lord, my soul lies paralyzed by many sins and unseemly deeds. Raise me up by Your divine power as You raised up the paralytic of old, that I may cry out to You: merciful Christ, glory to You!

– Adapted Hymn, Sunday of the Paralytic

Sing: Christ Is Risen (*Christos Anesti*)