



SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC MAY 15

THE GOSPEL READING

John 5:1-15

[A Paralytic Is Healed]

At that time, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Bethesda which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water; whoever stepped in first after the troubling of the water was healed of whatever disease he had. One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked.

Now that day was the sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet." But he answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your pallet, and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your pallet, and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.



THE SERMON

There was a pool in Jerusalem near the Sheep's Gate. The site can be visited even today in the Old City of Jerusalem. The pool featured five covered porches through which the water can be accessed. The pool was considered a holy site, and miracles were attested by Jewish tradition. Many individuals with various ailments would lay on the porches, waiting for the water to be agitated and the medicinal properties from the underground spring to be released.

It was believed that an angel of the Lord would come and stir the water, thereby giving it healing power. The first person to step in after the water was troubled was instantly healed of whatever ailment they had. There was a paralytic there, someone with reduced mobility for thirty-eight years. Jesus was in Jerusalem at that time, for the celebration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Jesus sees a paralytic and has compassion for him. He asks him: "Do you want to be healed?" Saint John Chrysostom says that Jesus "does not ask this question for His own information (this were unnecessary) but to bring to light the great patience of the man, who for thirty eight years had sat year after year by the place, in the hope of being cured" Only one of the many people lying near the Bethesda pool is singled out by the Lord. Although Jesus shows compassion for all, the Lord directs his attention to this particular paralytic.

The Lord's question to the paralytic makes evident that the man had kept the faith for almost forty years. The Lord selects him in recognition of his enduring devotion. The question also draws attention to the underlying condition of the paralytic. This man, who represents all of us, was paralyzed by the sickness of the body, just as we can become paralyzed by the weight of our sins and our shortcomings.

As the man needs to be healed, so we desperately need to be healed. As the man was unable to get to the waters himself, we also need God to help us. We depend entirely on Him. As the man hopes to be healed by the waters, our healing begins with our baptism. As the paralytic hopes for an angel to stir the waters, we place our trust in the Son of God Himself, Who can heal us by uniting His love and power to our perseverance and faith.

The man had waited for so long because others would get to the waters when they were stirred before he could. Still, he perseveres in faith. Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed because free will is always involved in God's miracles. His love initiates the giving of His Grace, but it is up to us to respond by accepting His Grace. From the point of view of the paralytic, being asked whether he wants to be healed is an odd thing to do. Imagine asking a sick person today if they want to regain their health. How can we then explain why Christ asks this of the paralytic?

God, who is love, who embodies the ultimate good, and who ultimately heals the

man, nevertheless first asks him whether he wants to be healed. Simply put, love, perfect love, God's love, the love God offers humanity, cannot be reconciled with force or pressure. Love is only compatible with freedom. Christ knows the exact condition of the paralytic, but He still asks him if he wants to be healed, because the Lord is not just a caring person, He is not just a prophet or a doctor, but He is God Himself, He is the God-Man who values freedom and our freedom to choose.

The great mystery of our faith is that God Himself did not come to the world as a powerful and mighty ruler, to constrain everyone to repentance, to save humanity by force. He came to the apostles as a friend, as a teacher, and continues to appear to us, in our lives, in very much the same manner. The personal encounter with Christ did not end in the apostolic age.

God continues to call us to dine with Him, to break bread with Him, to drink with Him. Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, this is what we live and relive, this experience of the mystery of God: God who is a friend, God who is a teacher, God who offers us unconditional love and freedom, God who trampled down death with His resurrection.

We are called to actively participate in the life of the Church, not to be mere spectators, watching from the sidelines. Let us not come to Church simply to observe, but to *participate*. When you start participating, you will start to see things occurring in your life in a more spiritual light, and you will slowly but surely start realigning your priorities with the freedom and love God grants all of us. And the stress and anxiety that you feel in your everyday life will slowly start to subside.

The Lord, therefore, calls on the paralytic, and us, to participate in the miracle of our salvation and our healing. God is full of grace, and in this way, He gives us opportunities to be healed from our bodily and spiritual illnesses. Jesus finally says to the paralytic, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." At once, the man is healed, and he takes up his pallet and walks.

This happens on the Sabbath (Saturday), the day of rest. The Jewish leaders did not care that a man disabled for so long had been healed. Instead, they question whether Jesus had broken the Sabbath Law. Instead of praising God for the miracle, they stick to the letter of the Law. This is a reminder for us to open ourselves to the love of God and His grace, rather than mere rules. "The Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

In the Gospel, according to John, many symbolic layers are used to convey actual events while at the same time pointing to heavenly themes relating to the theology of salvation. In this Gospel account, the pool becomes a metaphor for the Mosaic Law, and the man is an image of Israel yearning to find salvation in the Law. The paralytic had been in his condition for a long time, just as Israel had been waiting for divine rescue for a long time. Angels were said to have agitated the Bethesda pool, just as angels were said to have given the Law (Acts 7:53). The pool featured five entrances, just as the Mosaic Law

had five books. All these things, however, are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Throughout John's Gospel, we find this contrast between old and new.

The Lord heals the man simply by His word. The Son of God is the Word of God, and when He speaks to us, all things are made new, and we are made whole. The paralytic immediately walks and goes home. Later Jesus finds him in the Temple. The man, no doubt, was there giving thanks to God. The Lord says to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you."

As this Gospel lesson demonstrates, our bodies and souls are interconnected. Our tradition adopts a holistic approach that acknowledges the psychosomatic unity of human life, where the health of the body, the health of the mind, and our spiritual health are all connected. In practical terms, this means that a problem in one area can create symptoms or have a real impact in another area (for example, a spiritual problem may have physical consequences, just like a physical problem may lead to mental health issues). Through the sacraments, especially the Divine Liturgy, the most important sacrament, the Church offers holistic therapy for all that afflicts us in body and soul.

Let us persevere in faith. The Lord sees us, and wants to heal us. Let us desire this as well. Let us open ourselves to God. If we believe and persevere, we will continually receive His healing power. As we participate in the sacraments of the Church, we open ourselves to receiving the gift of eternal life for the healing of body and soul.