

Sunday of the Paralytic

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!

In each of the last two Sundays – Thomas Sunday and the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women – the Gospel readings spoke of the Lord's appearances after His Resurrection.

Yet today, the Gospel account is taken from an event during the Lord's public ministry, and appears to have little to do with His Resurrection. And so, why is it read today? Why do we read the account of the healing of the Paralytic on this Fourth Sunday of Pascha?

Well for two reasons.

First, because the Gospel is in fact resurrectional in nature. It is resurrectional because in it the Lord raised up a man who by all accounts though alive was already dead for this man who laid by the Sheep's Gate was unable to move, to walk, to work, really to do anything at all, even unable to put himself into the water to receive the healing brought by the angel. In this condition the man spent most of his life, lying in his bed as a corpse in a coffin.

And so, the Lord in raising up the paralytic from his bed in a very real way resurrected him, giving him a chance to live a new life. And if we paid close attention to the Gospel reading we know that this resurrection was not only physical but also spiritual.

In the beginning of the account, the Evangelist John records that the man who lay by the Sheep's Gate was paralyzed for some thirty eight years, but he says nothing about what caused the man's paralysis. This we learn only at the very end of the account, and we learn it from the Lord Himself, who reveals the cause when He says to the man, "See you have been made well. Be sure to sin no more, lest something worse come upon you."

With these words, the Lord reveals that the man's paralysis was caused by sin – exactly what sin, we do not know, nor does it matter for all kinds of sin can separate us from God and lead us to a life of spiritual or physical infirmity.

In his homily on this Gospel, St. John Chrysostom says that the Lord sometimes allows us to undergo tribulations of various kinds (sickness, loss of wealth, being insulted or embarrassed or other similar types of trials) for three reasons. First to help us be cleansed from sins which we have committed. Second to help us turn away from sins which we are committing presently. And third, to help us avoid sins which we would have committed in the future had we not befallen the tribulation.

But, as St. John also says, sometimes the Lord also allows us to undergo tribulations to liken us to the long-suffering Job of the Old Testament, who though righteous suffered

and endured many things, including the loss of his wealth, honor, and entire family, so that he might receive a greater reward for his patient endurance and trust in the Lord.

Unfortunately, however, the man in today's Gospel was not righteous as St. Job, and as we have seen, suffered from a sort of double paralysis as one all but dead in body and soul.

And for this reason, the Lord came that day to the pool by the Sheep's Gate, to raise the man up from his bed of sickness and spiritual infirmity – to resurrect him to newness of life by giving vitality to his body and forgiveness to his soul.

This then is the first reason why the Church places this Gospel before us today, for it speaks to us of resurrection to newness of life.

And the second reason why this Gospel is read today is because today's lesson helps to prepare us for the upcoming feast of Pentecost, which is just one month away.

As we know, one of the central themes of Pentecost is baptism. With the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, the Church's gates were opened and all who wished to enter into the newness of life which shone forth from Christ's Tomb were welcomed through repentance and the baptism of water and the Spirit.

In today's Gospel reading we see an image or foreshadowing of this great mystery of baptism. Remember the paralytic was at the Sheep's pool because he was awaiting the stirring of the water, for, as the Gospel records, "at a certain time an angel went down into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had."

Through this miraculous event, the Lord was preparing the Hebrew people to accept the mystery of baptism. A mystery not offered only a certain times through an angel, but offered at all times through the power and operation of the Holy Spirit Himself.

In just a few days, we will be at the midpoint between Pascha and Pentecost, and we will celebrate the Midfeast with the blessing of water. This feast recalls how the Lord went up to the Temple in the middle of the feast and cried out to all, "If anyone thirsts let Him come to Me and drink... for from him who believes in Me shall flow rivers of living water."

Then next Sunday, we will hear the Lord offer this same Living Water to the Samaritan Woman at the well. What is this living water? Well the Evangelist John tells us, he says that this Living Water of which the Lord spoke is nothing other than the Holy Spirit, who was not yet given because the Lord was not yet glorified but who would be given on the great day of Pentecost.

And so, brothers and sisters, as we continue our Paschal celebrations, let us also look ahead to Pentecost. For that which the Lord accomplished through His death, burial, and Resurrection has been extended to us through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Today we find ourselves in the fortunate company of those who have experienced and are continuing to experience the power of the Lord's Resurrection in our lives. For He has come into our midst and He has raised us from our beds of sinfulness to newness of life – not through the stirring of the water by an angel at the Sheep's pool but through the sanctifying and life-giving waters of Baptism.

And so, as we rejoice with the paralytic, let us also walk with him in new vitality along the straight and narrow path which leads to the Kingdom of God, all the time giving thanks to God and asking His grace so that we might sin no more.

And as we approach the Midfeast and Pentecost itself, let us ask the Lord to renew within us the spring of living water, the Holy Spirit, which He has promised to all those who believe in Him and receive the gift of Holy Baptism in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!