

16. March 2021

**“Jesus heals and warns”**

*Jn 5:1-16*

*After this there was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem next to the Sheep Pool there is a pool called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people, blind, lame, paralysed. For at intervals the angel of the Lord came down into the pool, and the water was disturbed, and the first person to enter the water after this disturbance was cured of any ailment he suffered from. One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in that condition for a long time, he said, 'Do you want to be well again?' 'Sir,' replied the sick man, 'I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets down there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around.' The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and started to walk around. Now that day happened to be the Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath; you are not allowed to carry your sleeping-mat.' He replied, 'But the man who cured me told me, "Pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around." They asked, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around"'? 'The man had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared, as the place was crowded. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, do not sin any more, or something worse may happen to you.' The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him. It was because he did things like this on the Sabbath that the Jews began to harass Jesus.*

From today's text we can meditate on three aspects:

1. Let us notice the love of our Lord, who has pity on the poor man. We can imagine how He looks at him with love and wants to heal him. It is a great consolation to know that His gaze is always on us men, and we can be sure that the Lord sees us with special love when we are suffering. If he does not take away our sufferings, he helps us to bear them. Being aware of this, we no longer have to take suffering as a meaningless burden, but we can unite it with the Lord's pain to make it fruitful.

The sick man in today's Gospel had suffered so much: 38 years of sickness and so many disappointments in not being able to enter the water first to be healed. No

one had noticed him or helped him, yet Jesus comes and has compassion. This is good news for us: God will not forget us, He understands our suffering, whereas often people do not really understand us.

2. The attitude of the Jews. They cannot accept the miracle that the Lord has done for this man. They are locked into the precept that the Sabbath is the Lord's day and that nothing may be done on it that disturbs His rest. Certainly it was very positive to keep the Sabbath carefully, according to what the Lord Himself had commanded the people of the Old Covenant (*cf. Ex 20:8-11*). To this day, the Jews are very zealous about the Lord's Day. On many occasions in Jerusalem, I have witnessed the joy in the air at the beginning of the Sabbath. Suddenly, there is a great silence in the city and Jews rush to the Western Wall or to the synagogues. Large families can be seen attending religious ceremonies together.

However, in the context presented to us in the gospel, a deeper understanding could certainly have been reached. Joy at the miraculous healing of that poor man should have prevailed; and it should not have been seen as a violation of the Sabbath rest, for what Jesus had done was no ordinary work. It seems evident that the hearts of those men were already closed against Him, so that whatever He did was regarded with suspicion. Therefore, there was no proper discernment of the situation. How important is the discernment of spirits!

3. Jesus, having healed him, said to the man, "*Now you are well again, do not sin any more, or something worse may happen to you.*" What could Jesus have been referring to? We cannot simply make a connection between a person's sin and his illness. Nor would we, in keeping with the Tradition of the Church, dare to say always: "You are sick because you have sinned and you will be cured once you turn from your sin." This logic could only apply if we were dealing with psychological afflictions that are the product of sin, and which could lead to illness.

Perhaps Jesus wanted to tell him that he had received an enormous grace and that he should respond to it with a life dedicated to God, and not forget to whom he owed his healing. Recall the passage of the healing of the ten lepers, only one of whom returned to give thanks and praise to the Lord (*cf. Lk 17:12-19*).

Jesus probably also had in mind that the man's paralysis kept him day by day with his eyes fixed on God. Now that he was healed, he had to be careful not to be rash. Since God always has man's eternal salvation in view, it is possible that he may leave him an illness or other suffering, in order to guard him from other dangers to which he might be exposed if he were in excellent health.

In any case, we can accept Jesus' exhortation to the paralytic for our daily life, spending our lives in vigilance and avoiding sin. Indeed, sin is worse than all diseases and every bodily suffering, for it destroys our inner life. We must avoid sin and overcome it, in the strength of the Lord! Then our eyes and our body will be light (*cf. Lk 11:34-36*).