

20. January 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
“A healing in the pool of Bethesda”

Jn 5:1-18

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-za'tha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. 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 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.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. And this was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working still, and I am working.” This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

For many years, this man lay by the pool at Bethesda, known as the Sheep Gate, hoping to be healed. Like many other sick people, he waited for the water in the pool to stir. It was said that from time to time the angel of the Lord would descend into the pool and stir the water, and whoever jumped in first would be cured of whatever ailment he had.

But because of his physical handicap, this poor man was always too late, and he had no one to take him into the pool in time. A desperate situation for him...

But Jesus, the 'Lord of the angels', who had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast, saw his need and took pity on him, saying to him, *'Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.'* The man was instantly made well, took up his mat and walked.

That day was the Sabbath, and carrying a pallet was considered work, which was forbidden on the 'Lord's Day'. So the Jews were shocked and confronted the man. He told them his story and later, because they wanted to know, he told them that it was Jesus who had healed him.

This man had met Jesus again in the temple, and there the Lord had warned him not to sin again, lest something worse happen to him. On the face of it, these words seem to make a connection between sin and sickness, if by 'something worse' Jesus meant physical sickness and not the corruption of the soul through sin. In another passage of this Gospel, however, the Lord explicitly rejects such a connection. *"As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him."* (Jn 9:1-3).

In any case, let us also heed the Lord's admonition not to sin again, a warning that should be particularly strong after experiencing a miraculous healing like that of the man at the pool of Bethesda. On the one hand, gratitude for what Jesus had done, and on the other, a warning not to sin again.

When the Jews knew that it was Jesus who had healed the man, they began to persecute Him, thinking that He had broken the Sabbath law. In the Gospel of Luke we can see clearly what Jesus thought about this. In chapter 14 we read:

"One sabbath when he went to dine at the house of a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees, they were watching him. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?" But they were silent. Then he took him and healed him, and let him go. And he said to them,

"Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?" And they could not reply to this." (Lk 14:1-6).

Instead of rejoicing at the healing of this man who had suffered for so many years, instead of recognising that it was the work of God, the Jews closed their hearts more and more to Jesus. The Lord had invited them to understand, not only by the miraculous healing itself, but by giving them the key in His answer: *"My Father is working still, and I am working."*

He had opened the way for them to understand more deeply who He was. All the Jews had to do was to take that path, even if they were reluctant to do so at first. A single step in the right direction would have enabled the Holy Spirit to lead them further. But the opposite happened. They considered it blasphemous for Jesus to call God His Father, for He had *"made himself equal with God"*. Their hardened hearts plunged headlong into darkness, and the result was deadly, for *"the Jews sought all the more to kill Him"*.