

Homily For Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Ezekiel 47: 1-9,12 "This water ... when it enters the sea, the stagnant waters will become fresh."

Psalms 46: 1-8 "God is our refuge & strength ... we will not fear, though the earth should change."

John 5: 1-16 "Jesus said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

Do You Want To Be Made Well?

Introduction

Every day in Lent is another opportunity for consideration of one of the big three themes in our journey to Easter: either prayer, fasting or almsgiving. The readings suggest today a prayerful reflection on flowing water; on life-giving water. Always in need of conversion in our prayer life, we receive yet another opportunity to invite Jesus Christ into our lives as a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

Have you ever had someone ask you a question that would challenge you, but you couldn't avoid because it was obvious how important it is? In the Gospels, whenever we hear Jesus asking a question, it should hit us like that. Today, Jesus asks a man, "Do you want to be made well?" It sounds like just a part of the story we are reading, but we should hear it jumping straight out of that story into the middle of our conversation with Christ on our journey to Easter.

Jesus Asks A Question

Jesus is in Jerusalem at a pool, the name of which means "house of flowing." There are people with all kinds of illnesses there, but Jesus picks out one man. He's not like so many of the others Jesus heals. He doesn't know about Jesus. He isn't curious and, throughout the story gives no indication of much faith. This is a challenge to us as we hear his question and echoes of others: Do you want to be made well? Do you know who it is who is offering you healing? Are you someone of whom it can be said "Why did you doubt, O you of little faith?"

Why does Jesus pick him out, then? Well, he does recognize the man's long suffering. Most of us can probably relate to that in some way or another. He has

had his pitiable condition for 38 years, it says. That's a strange number. I don't want to go too far down that rabbit hole, but there is the suggestion that this is the number of years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after they had rebelled against God at a place called Kadesh. It was a key moment because they could have entered into the promised land right there, but refused to trust that God would be with them. So that number is the journey from sin to the promised land.

"Do you want to be made well?" His reply is more of a complaint. He does not respond with any sort of faith, or even a request. "I can't get anyone to put me in the water." And, even after he is healed, he doesn't seem to have been changed. He can't answer the question about who healed him. He doesn't know Jesus in the ordinary sense and he certainly has not experienced the conversion which comes from knowing Jesus in the deeper sense. It's a frustrating story because it doesn't give us something to inspire us.

Those who demand to know the name of the healer also do not focus on the healing but on the fact of the healed man walking around with his mat on a Sabbath, and on Jesus healing on the Sabbath, both big problems. Israelites had died rather than profane that holy day.

Again, we should hear a faint echo. What's more important than the Sabbath? The one who is Lord of the Sabbath. What's more important than the temple? The one who is, himself, the place of the holy and glorious presence of God.

Let's go back and look at the healing once more. "Stand up. Take up your mat and walk." The lame man's focus had been on the water. In the light of Ezekiel's vision and many other biblical images, this is perfectly reasonable.

Ezekiel/Psalm

The prophet had a vision at the time of Israel's darkest hour. The image worth noting is of a river. It is life giving water which flows. It has the power to make stagnant water fresh, it says. The water flows from the sanctuary from the place of holiness. What is it that makes the sanctuary holy? It is the presence of God. The psalm says as much: The Lord is with us. There is a river, whose streams make

glad the City of God. The holy habitation of God the most high. Wherever the water goes, there is healing and life.

But Jesus asks: Do you want to be made well? Then he says: Stand up ... walk ... be healed. What's missing? Jesus does not use water. He does not ask the man needing healing to go into the water. What does this tell us who believe in the power of the waters of Baptism for our entry into the life of grace?

Call To Action

Jesus begs us to open our hearts to see the answer to that question: I AM that living water. I AM the water gushing up to eternal life, who wants to flow into the stagnant waters of YOUR life, to make them fresh and life-giving in the circumstances in your life.

Today, we would do well to take even a short time where we reflect on only that question: Do you want to be made well? Will we answer with a complaint about what life has done to us or will we say yes, you know I want to be healed in my spirit. Will we be able to answer the question, do you know who it is that healed you of the sin which keeps us from allowing that water from the sanctuary of God to flow into the stagnant waters of our own sinfulness and bring new life?

Today is the day and now is the time to reflect deeply on what might keep us from answering the question: Do you want to be made well?