

## **Homily For Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent - Year I St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - Tuesday, March 21, 2023**

**Ezekiel 47:1-9,12** "The river flows east from the sanctuary... making stagnant water fresh."

**Psalms 46:1-8** "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God."

**John 5:1-16** "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up."

### **Follow the Water**

#### **Introduction**

There is an expression which tries to explain what happens in the world. If you really want to know what's going on, follow the money. Who is getting paid, and by whom, and for what? I guess that's true in the world. I'm not so wise in these things.

But when it comes to the meaning of life, which is spiritual, not physical or worldly, the life rule has an entirely different focus. If we look at these passages today in the light of our faith, we might rather say that, in the spiritual life, if you want to know what's going on, follow the water.

There is lots of water in today's readings. There is stagnant water. There is water that is disturbed. There is water that is dead. And, there is flowing water that turns dead things into living things, and living things into abundantly producing things.

It reminds me of part of a prayer of consecration to Mary that includes these lines: "If I fall, please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side." I always change "If I fall" to "when I fall." That seems more like the human experience, certainly more like my experience. It's not a matter of 'if' I am going to forget what makes me whole, what makes me clean. In this prayer, falling clearly means to fall away from Christ. That is, to sin. The consecration prayer goes on: "Help me to never lose my trust in this fountain of love and mercy." There is a falling, a leading, a piercing, a trusting, and a washing in blood and water.

## John

John tells us about a man who is crippled. He has been so for 38 years. He is by a pool of water. That water is stagnant most of the time, but every once in awhile that water gets stirred up. Is it a natural phenomenon or a magical one? Well, the story that is told is that it is angels who stir up the water. And, when that happens, the story is that the first one in the pool will be healed of whatever malady or condition they have.

The problem is that there is nothing in Judaism, the faith inherited all the way back from Abraham, that tells of such a magical kind of healing power. There are prophets from God who have healed, but there is nothing like this anywhere in the Books of Moses, or the prophets, or the mighty works of God, that speaks of this kind of magic. It is a pagan story, based on idolatry, the worship of gods who are capricious. You can't really know what those gods are after. They look like they care. They offer something to which only some have access. You can't be too crippled or you will get trampled by those who are more able bodied in the crush of the rush to get the prize. And, if you do get close to the prize, those gods are just as likely to snatch it away at the moment you think you have it. That's how the gods of this world work. It's how they keep control. Follow the money. Follow the magic. Expect to get trampled.

The God of the universe tells an entirely different story. All have equal dignity. No one is defined by his disability but only by his willingness to trust in the God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and mercy. Bodies and hearts still suffer, but the God of love is even closer to them, not further away, when they do suffer.

Jesus is the one from God who reveals these truths in his own body, in his own life. This is the Jesus who asks the man who has been crippled for 38 years, "Do you want to be made well?" I think we assume that we would answer yes. But perhaps we have been hurting for so long, we have lost our trust that God will keep his promise and come to us. Perhaps we have chased the wrong things for so long that we trust in pagan ideas and worldly ideas of riches and success. Those things are so attractive.

Be assured that the man's crippled body is an image of the crippled and broken hearts we carry around with us, that the people around us we tend to judge harshly have been carrying around with them. We know so many people who are sitting by a stagnant pool waiting for some kind of magic. Then Jesus comes along asking: "Do you want to be made well?" But sin, and dependence on the gods of the world literally paralyze us. So, instead of saying yes, we complain that no one will carry us to the water when it is stirred up.

Jesus is not deterred. He tells us to stop looking at the stagnant water and those waiting for magic to happen. Instead, look up into his eyes who is gazing at us. Then we will see the face of God, the source of living water that he is offering to be poured into our hearts and stirred up by his Spirit, a well of pure life giving water that seeks to bring life from dead things, and abundant life in things that are alive but parched and starving.

### **Ezekiel**

Ezekiel's vision is about the future temple. The church is preparing us with this prophecy. During Holy Week, Jesus will be pierced and from his side will come blood and water. The temple is Jesus' Sacred Heart. From his side comes the river of life giving water mixed with his own blood.

Ezekiel sees what will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is that life giving water that will bring even the Dead Sea to life, making it fresh and fruitful and abundant. Jesus is also the temple from which the water flows. The temple of his body brings forth the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.

### **Call To Conversion**

Saint John Chrysostom will say that in Bethesda pool sick people cured their bodies, while in the Baptism those same sick cure their soul. God's power is evidenced through water.

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.

Are you going through a difficult stage in your life, yearning for healing and salvation? Maybe you live in dryness and bitterness. Is there no river flowing within you? God wants to give us his water, his abundant life and blessings. Jesus promised, "Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them." Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit who is the very presence of God. Are you thirsty for the Spirit? Come to the river. The mercy of our God flows like a rushing river. His presence is healing, sanctifying, and fulfilling.

And so I repeat every day to Mary, "When I fall, please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side. Help me never to lose my trust in this fountain of love and mercy." Brothers and sisters, let us follow the water.

## **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *All who are thirsty, come to the waters, says the Lord.*

### **Collect:**

**Ezekiel:** *In the midst of the vision, the angel brought me to the entrance of the temple. The water was flowing toward the east (for the temple faced east). Going eastward, the man measured on thousand cubits, and the water was ankle deep. Again, it was knee deep. Again, it was up to the waist. Again, it was a river that I could not cross ... He said: this water flows toward the east into the Arabah, and when it enters the stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every creature will live. On both banks there will grow fresh fruit for food and leaves for healing because the water for them flows from the sanctuary.*

**Psalms:** *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.*

**John:** *In Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool called Beth-zatha. One man was there who had been ill for thirty eight years. Jesus said to him: Do you want to be made well? The sick man answered: Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. Jesus said to him: Stand up, take your mat and walk. At once the man was made well. The Jews said to the man: It is not lawful for you to carry your mat on the Sabbath. Who is the man? Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: See, you have been made well. Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath.*