

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Tuesday, March 29, 2022

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."

Life Giving Water

Introduction

Jesus asks a man, "Do you want to be made well?" I think we assume that we would answer yes, for sure, whether we are thinking of spiritual or physical wellness. We might pause today in our path toward Easter and really let Jesus ask us that question. The answer seems obvious, yet why would so many in our world reject the one who asks it? One answer hits us today. Perhaps we have been hurting for so long, we have lost our trust that God will keep his promise.

John

John, the writer of the 4th Gospel, has a purpose for each of the miracles he recounts. He doesn't try to overwhelm the reader with many amazing feats of healing. He calls them 'signs'. Each of the eight miracles are signs of the Messiah, who comes from God and IS the God who brings healing and hope. This healing of the paralyzed man at a pool is the 3rd sign that Jesus does after his ministry begins, after the changing of water to wine at wedding in Cana, and healing a man's son at the point of death in Capernaum. Jesus does not heal everyone. That's not the point. Healing is a sign that God has come amongst His people. All of the prophecies and events and people of the Old Testament are now fulfilled and made present in Jesus, the man who is God.

There are people with all kinds of illnesses at the pool, but Jesus picks out one man and asks him, "Do you want to be made well?" The answer seems like it should be obvious. Of course, we would answer. And yet, that's not what happens. That's not what he answers. Instead, he complains bitterly about his life.

There does not to be much faith. Later, we find out that Jesus will not heal anyone without at least a shred of faith. There has to be some receptivity to activate the healing miracle. Perhaps Jesus does recognize the man's long suffering as the cause of his bitterness. That can be hope for those who have lost hope after years of suffering.

At some point, however, we have to allow our hearts to be transformed. That's the purpose of the forty days of Lent. Thirty-eight years means that there is still time to be made ready to receive the grace of God. If the people in the desert had been ready for the promised land after 38 years, God would have led them there. But, they weren't and it took another two years. Neither is this man quite ready. John is telling us that the healed man still has a way to go.

In the meanwhile, he can't answer the question about whether he wants to be healed or, afterwards, who healed him. His gratitude level is very low. He didn't even bother to ask Jesus' name. Even after meeting Jesus and finding out his name, what he does is to betray him to the Chief Priests and the Pharisees. This will happen to Jesus consistently. His work of renewal and creation will continue through the resurrection but for now the sense of persecution will grow.

This is a challenge to us as we hear his question. Do we want to be made well? Do we know who it is who is offering you healing? Are we ready to be transformed into the children of light that God has made us to be, or will we stay bitter and afraid. The way we have been these last two years suggests that we are more comfortable being afraid than we are trusting in Jesus who asks "Do you want to be made well? Do you want your hearts to be turned to God who loves you without limit?"

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel had a vision at the time of Israel's darkest hour. The image is of a river. It is life giving water which has the power to make stagnant water fresh. 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. If we think about water long enough, it will always remind us of Jesus at his Baptism. What does John say to

him? You should be baptizing me. But Jesus says, for now let us do it this way, to fulfil all righteousness. But Jesus doesn't need the water to make him holy. He makes the water holy, which becomes a fountain of life for us in baptism. As the psalmist says, wherever the water goes, there is healing and life.

Eventually, the water in the vision flows right into the Dead Sea, where there is no life, and makes it fresh. Wherever things appear lifeless, out of the inner sanctuary will flow a stream of life giving water, even where all seems dead and hopeless.

Eventually, you can't cross the river it is so wide. But, like the trees growing on either side, that's not necessary. What is necessary is being in the place we are, and receiving the life giving water. Jesus will make fresh and life giving what has previously been stagnant in us. Jesus is the temple and the living water that comes from it.

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.

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. 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? Let the river of life wash ourselves clean of our bitterness. Confess our sin and be healed.

Key Passages

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

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.*

Psalm: *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.*

Communion Antiphon: *The Lord is my shepherd. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose, near restful waters he leads me.*