

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

St Peter's 8:30 Mass - Tuesday, March 12, 2024

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."

Jesus Asks A Question

Introduction

For some time, we have been seeing the rise of atheism, the belief that there is no creating power behind the origin of the universe, or of the incredible order and structure we see in everything, including life itself. This belief necessarily leaves a vacuum. That is why the atheist generally believes in something, usually in science and the forces and of nature. But because every person needs some kind of hope, some kind of meaning and purpose, this belief often leads to a kind of spiritual searching which leaves God out, but a searching for what is true nevertheless.

John

John tells us about a crippled man who has been slowly losing hope 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 kind of magical one? The story that is told is that it is angels who stir up the water. And, when that happens, the first one in the pool will be healed of whatever malady or condition they have.

There are many miracles of God in Israel's history, but there is nothing in Judaism, all the way back to Abraham, that tells of such a magical kind of healing power. It is a pagan story, based on the worship of gods who are unpredictable. They make offers to humans but are just as likely to snatch it away at the moment you think you have it. That's how the gods of this world keep control, turning people away from true worship of the living God.

Thirty eight years is a long time. It is easy to see how a person suffering from such a crippling condition could turn from God to empty promises. That man's crippled body is an image of the many crippled and broken hearts around us. We know so many who are sitting by a stagnant pool waiting for some kind of magic. When Jesus comes along asking: "Do you want to be made well?" sin, and dependence on the gods of the world, paralyze the heart. So, instead of saying yes, it is easier to complain that no one will help.

Jesus is not deterred. He tells the crippled man, as he tells all people, 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, 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.

Thirty eight is the number of years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after they had rebelled against God. 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. That is the very point at which the spiritually crippled man finds himself as he encounters Jesus.

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. 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. As the psalmist says, wherever the water goes, there is healing and life.

There has never been a river in Jerusalem. If anything, it would be a river of the blood of sacrificed animals: bulls and sheep and goats and birds. Ezekiel is seeing dimly in a dream what we know for certain, that the new life giving river will flow like blood and water from the sanctuary of the saviour's own heart on the cross.

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 Conversion

As in the case of the man in the Gospel, Jesus bypasses the water and heals directly. That's because Jesus is the river of life. Every stream of water in the Old Testament is a type, a foreshadowing, of the source of life, Jesus himself. He flows into the dead waters of our hearts and makes them alive. The only thing he asks of us is: "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus begs us to open our hearts to hear him say: 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.

In our baptism liturgy, all who are about to receive that life giving water of baptism are asked if they reject Satan's empty promises. If they do not, they cannot be baptized. The two things are incompatible.

During Holy Week, we will see Jesus pierced, and from his side will come blood and water. From his Sacred Heart comes the river of life giving water mixed with his own blood. Like the sanctuary in Ezekiel's vision, the temple of his body brings forth the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.

God has appointed our lives to last only a certain number of days. I have no idea when my life will end. Like the previous 38 years the man at the pool lived, it is this very moment God is asking me the only question that matters at this point in my life: Do you want to be made well? My answer to him will determine my eternal destiny.

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 anymore, 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.*