

The Living and Life-Giving Word

Gospel: John 5:1-15 AV. *After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.*

" Sir, I have no man"

The Holy Church designated the reading of this passage in this Paschal period because the pool of Bethesda (lit. the house of mercy) was from the beginning the symbol of the sacrament of Baptism. We should not forget the link between Baptism and Pascha. In the Church the period of Great Lent was a time of preaching and teaching the Catechumens, and Bright Saturday was the day of Baptism, a passage from death to life as in Pascha. The Link between Baptism and Pascha has to do with the idea of the new life, the new creation established by the Resurrection of Christ.

There are two things clearly shown in this passage. The first is the suffering of man who lies under the weakness of corrupted nature. In the beginning, man was created corruptible by nature and incorruptible by grace. Today, this man lies under the yoke of the strange corrupted world. The shout of the Paralytic, " Sir, I have no man," represents the sighing of a man who is in an unnatural state.

The second thing shown in this passage is the presentation of possible solutions to solve this painful problem and stop the sighing of humanity. There are three sides facing this challenge. The first side is "the other," and the paralytic said that he had "no man" to help him... The second side is the religious people who are supposed to give religious and salvific answers. The passage revealed the failure of those as well. The last side is the one capable of saying to the paralytic, "Rise and walk..." What he says gets done. His words give life!

The capabilities of man are steadily growing. The human brain is a precious divine gift. It is one of the characteristics of the likeness of God in man. Some say that human efforts are being more and more successful in dealing with pain and corruption. Others say that the actual situation is not the case just mentioned. In his civilization and advancements, man has shortened the average length of man's life on earth. This is so because man has introduced new mortal diseases into the world by exploiting nature, which, even though it was corrupted after the fall, is innocent from the existence of these new diseases. Man introduced these new diseases. Whatever the situation is, whether human efforts fail or succeed, they just shorten or prolong the average life. When human efforts succeed in stopping the corruption of the body, they effectively just postpone it. Humanity has developed ways to deal with certain diseases and with natural pain, and probably will develop more ways, but it will never know how to deal with the disease of "old age."

In addition to all these advances, human speech and words are full of self-interest and selfish desires, glories and honors. A quick look at our complicated societies will show how much man today shares life with his neighbor in many ways. Habitation is rarely in a detached house as it was in the past. Now, man lives with many neighbors. Today a building contains what a whole town used to contain. Work also involves many people, and there is no individual work or trades. The simplest work demands collaboration. The world of specialization demands that every accomplishment use the collaboration on many sides. We notice, however, that relationships between people are now more complicated

and needful since loneliness and individualism have increased.

At the end, the word of the paralytic is truthful, "I have no man." Human civilizations and inventions are not just necessary, but also desired by God. All these, however, do not provide a permanent solution, but rather give a temporary one. Human speech stays human and moves around, but does not solve man's problems.

On the second side, the religious leaders, the hope at first seems that they will provide a solution, since human civilization has failed to do so. The Gospel passage quickly reveals the failure of the religious leaders because they give human solutions. When Religion becomes the religion of the letter, not of the Spirit, it fails. The healing of the paralytic was a clear sign of the victory of life over the power of corruption. Faced with this healing, however, the religious leaders did not discover this overflowing of life, but saw in it as a violation of the Law and the letter of the Law. Such people have changed religion and misinterpreted it. Religion was supposed to be a channel of life.

Religious speech if limited to words and letters remains not just human, but deceptive and destructive, because it is vain words. At least, human words give some comfort to the afflicted.

Religion is not a contemplative philosophy about life. The true religion is the one that has life in itself. Religion is not the transferring of information and fulfillment of duties. True religion ought to give solutions to human suffering. It ought to be overflowing with life. If it is the opposite of this, than it becomes truly the opium of the people. The irreligious and inhuman actions

of religious people show clearly the case where religious speech becomes destructive and mortal instead of life giving. Instead of healing, it yields corruption. These resulting actions reveal the corruptibility of religious speech.

The third side was God. He spoke and it happened. He spoke and life, instead of corruption, overflowed. When the word of God meets man, it changes and transforms him. This is a sign of the life that it contains.

The word of God is a piece of incorruptibility given to us here and now. It is life and a pledge of eternal life. The word of God is the beginning of the Kingdom itself. That's why the word of God is destructive to the first two sides we mentioned. Those who oppose Christ and oppose the faith are from the company of atheists and from the company of apostates. This is the summary of History that is facing the Resurrection of Christ. Whatever applies to the history of civilizations and humanity applies as well on the personal life, where the life giving word of God is also the one that makes the old man and world dead. When man and the word of God meet, and if the former wills, their meeting leads to dynamism, and this becomes a sign of life. At the end, the word of God is constructive to the new man and the new creation. This new creation is in the likeness of the state of the world after the Resurrection of Christ.

This dynamism resulting from the divine word leads man towards the way of never ending perfection. Thus, man will live in continuous self-renewal and transformation. This is what we call the life of repentance. The never-ending life in spiritual perfection means the continuity of the state of repentance and the

unceasing movement from the old to the new, a continual Pascha.

I have no man. We have no salvation except in our God. The ancestors symbolized human history by a serpent eating its tail, meaning that everything returns to what it was before. The Resurrection unveiled the deception of idols. Religions and man have both human characters. They have no life in them. Life comes from the life of God. It comes from the life of God.

The Divine Word can disseminate life. The Resurrection of Christ is the feast of the pledge of the Kingdom. It has no pain, sorrow, or sighing, but life eternal.

Do you then wish to be healed?! The water in the new pool, the Church, moves always. And the Lord stands at the door, and knocks, "Behold I make everything new." Amen.