



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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A Band Aid or a Cure? Week of May 6, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRISTUS VOZKRESE!

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath ...

The Fourth Sunday of Pascha is observed in the Orthodox Church as the Sunday of the paralyzed man. I used to wonder why this lesson was chosen by the Holy Fathers for such an important day as a Sunday midway through the Paschal season. But now, after years of hearing it and contemplating its message, I finally understand. It took me long enough! It was chosen, because among other things, it proclaims so clearly the entirely *radical* nature of what our Lord offers us – and the radical nature of what we must do to take it. He offers a cure for what ails us, not just a mere band aid to cover it up.

The paralyzed man had been unable to move for 38 years. To him, the only solution to his problem was simple. All he needed was someone to get him into the pool of Beth-za'tha at just the right time, right after the angel stirred the water. But because he was paralyzed, he could not do for himself what others were unwilling or unable to do for him. So for 38 years he struggled and waited and hoped in vain.

Then, one day as he lay waiting and hoping under one of those five porches at the pool, the Lord came before him and asked him the simple question we heard in our lesson: *"Do you want to be healed?"* One would think he would have screamed out the answer, *"YES, Lord! Heal me!"* But instead, he offers to the Great Physician a detailed explanation of the impossibility of his situation. *"I cannot be healed, because I am unable to get into the water in time."* But the Lord in mercy nevertheless reached out and healed Him with a Word. And everything changed. The Lord told him to pick up his pallet and walk – to do the first work he had been able to do for almost 4 decades. What did it matter to the Lord Who made the Law that it was Sabbath? It was a day of rejoicing: for the once paralyzed man it was the beginning of New Day!

Every one of us knows what the paralyzed man felt that day when he lay on his pallet waiting for someone to help him carry out what he thought would be the one in a million shot at being healed. We all know, for we are all just like him. Perhaps we are not paralyzed in our bodies, but surely we all paralyzed in our souls. And each of us thinks we know what we need to do in order to get better, to be fulfilled in life, to be happy, to be whole.

The paralyzed man said it like this:

"Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me."

We say it differently but with exactly the same spirit as did he:

If only had the right job! If only my spouse cared about me. If only my children would do as I want them to do! If only I had what other men or women have! If only I had enough money; if only I could win the lottery! If only I could have one good chance! If only I had a better mind or a better body! if only I had better health, better luck, or a better position.

And so on and so forth. Each one of us has said one or more of each one of these things; some of us have said them all and many others like them. And not a few of us has prayed for them. We ask God for help, to accomplish those things we think will help us or make us satisfied. And when we do not get what we want or what we think we need, we turn away. But God wants to do more than help us, Brothers and Sisters, just as He wanted to do more for that paralyzed man than merely help him get into the water at the right time. He stands before us as He stood before the paralyzed man and asks the very same question: *"Do you want to be healed?"* He does not ask us if we want Him to help us do what we think should be done. No; He asks simply this, *"Do you want to be healed?"*

We are not Orthodox Christians, because we think that Jesus will make things better for us in the ways we think they should be better. We are Orthodox Christians, because we believe that the radical solution He brings to us is the only solution that is worth accepting. The Lord brings life abundant, and wholeness and healing without end for us who will allow Him to heal us. He does not bring comfort or ease, but a New Creation. The solution He brings is a radical one: not mere comfort or empty promises

in the face of death. No; He brings Life eternal in the face of death. He tramples down death by death in an act of sacrificial new creation that reaches into all eternity for each of us, who will allow Him to be our Lord. There is really no other way to say it. He stands before us with the cure; and all we ask for is a band aid.

So that, Brothers and Sisters, is the lesson of the paralyzed man that I would have you contemplate today. The Lord stands before each of us; and, Glory to God, He ignores our foolish desires, our empty wishes and our selfish wants. But because He loves us, He nevertheless asks, *“Do you want to be healed?”* And as He did for the paralyzed man, so will He do for us. In mercy, He stands ready to heal our paralyzed souls as well. He offers not just a mere band aid; what *He* gives is the cure for all eternity.

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!* Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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