

## Sunday of the Paralytic (Saint John Chrysostom)

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In a gold-mine, even the most insignificant vein isn't overlooked, however difficult it might be to work. So, with the Holy Scriptures, you ignore even a jot or tittle at your peril. Everything needs to be examined. The Holy Spirit has dictated them and there's nothing in them unworthy of our attention. See what the Evangelist [John 4] says here: this was the second sign that Jesus performed on His way from Judea to Galilee. John didn't merely add the word 'second', but is emphasizing the miracle Christ had worked among the Samaritans. He wants to show that, even though there was a second sign, those who saw and believed had not attained the same stature as those who believed without seeing.



And then it was a feast of the Jews. Which feast? I believe it was Pentecost when Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He made a point of attending feasts in the city. On the one hand in order to show that He was keeping the feast with them, and, on the other, to attract ordinary people to Himself. Because on these days, a great many ordinary people gathered. There was, in Jerusalem, a pool called the Sheep Gate-Bethesda in Hebrew- which had five arcades. A large number of sick people gathered there- lame, blind or withered- and waited for the water to be disturbed...

First of all, bodily infections and other illnesses can be cured with water. Because He wants to lead us closer to the gift of baptism, God doesn't merely cure infections with water, but other sickness, too...

The angel descended and stirred the water to give it curative powers, so that the Jews might learn that the Lord of the angels is able to cure the sicknesses of the soul. But just as here the curative power wasn't a natural property of the water (because then it would always have 'worked'), but depended on the presence of the angel, so, with us, it's not just the water acting: it washes away all sins when it receives the Grace of the Holy Spirit. All around the pool, a whole host of sick people had camped- blind, lame, lepers- all of whom were waiting for the disturbance of the water and, for all of them, their disability was a hindrance as



regards their chances of a cure. But now each has power to approach, for here it isn't an angel who disturbs the water, it's the Lord of Angels, Who performs all things. A sick person can't now say, 'I have no-one'. They can't say: 'No sooner do I start to get down, than somebody else gets there before me'. And even were the whole world to come, Grace isn't spent, the energy isn't exhausted. It remains as great as ever. Just as the sun's rays give light every day, yet aren't exhausted, nor is the light reduced by giving so abundant a supply, much less is the power of the Spirit depleted by the numbers of those who enjoy it. And this miracle was performed in order that, by learning that it's possible to heal the diseases of the body with water, and having practiced this knowledge for a long time, we might more easily believe that it can also heal the diseases of the soul.

But why, in the end, did Jesus leave the rest, and come to someone who had been there for thirty-eight years? And why did He ask him, 'Do you wish to be made whole?' Not so that He could find out -He already knew the answer- but to demonstrate the man's perseverance, so that we learn that this was the reason why He left the others and came especially to him. The sick man replied with: 'Lord, when the water's disturbed, I have no-one to put me into the pool, but as I'm coming another steps down before me'. This is why Jesus asked him if he wanted to be made whole. He didn't ask: 'Shall I heal you?' (as yet the man had formed no great notion about Him), but 'Do you want to be made whole?' The perseverance of the paralytic is astonishing: he'd been there for thirty-eight years, and each year hoped to be freed from his disability. He continued to attend and didn't give up. Had he not been so diligent, would not the future, if not the past, have been enough to get him to leave? I ask you to consider how watchful the other sick people there were likely to have been, given that the time when the water would be disturbed was uncertain. The halt and the lame might, indeed, observe it, but what about the blind who couldn't see? Perhaps they realized from the general clamour which would have arisen.

***(to be continued)***