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“Let us give voice to our desire to be healed”

In his 18 June general audience, Pope Leo XIV continued his catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, speaking about the healing of the paralytic.

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Dear brothers and sisters,

Let us continue to contemplate Jesus who heals. In a particular way, I would like to invite you to think

about the situations in which we feel “blocked” and stuck in a dead end. At times, in fact, it seems to be pointless to continue to hope; we become resigned and no longer have the desire to fight. This situation is described in the Gospels with the image of paralysis. This is why today I would like to dwell on the healing of a paralytic, narrated in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John (5:1-9).

Jesus goes to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. He does not immediately go to the Temple; instead, he stops at a door, where the sheep were probably washed before being offered as a sacrifice. Near this door there were also many sick people who, unlike the sheep, were excluded from the Temple because they were considered unclean! And so it is Jesus himself who reaches out to them in their suffering. These people hoped for a miracle that might change their

fate; indeed, next to the door there was a pool, whose waters were considered thaumaturgical, that is, capable of healing: at certain moments the water would stir and, according to the belief of the time, whoever immersed themselves first would be healed.

In this way a sort of “war among the poor” came to be created: we can imagine the sorry scene of these sick people who wearily dragged themselves to enter the pool. That pool was called *Betzatà*, which means “house of mercy”: it could be an image of the Church, where the sick and the poor gather and where the Lord comes to heal and give hope.

Jesus specifically addresses a man who has been paralyzed for some thirty-eight years. By now he is resigned, because he never manages to immerse himself in the pool when

the water stirs (cf. v. 7). In effect, what paralyzes us, very often, is disappointment. We feel discouraged and risk falling into apathy.

Jesus asks the paralytic a question that may seem superfluous: “Do you want to be well?” (v. 6). Instead, it is a necessary question, because when one is stuck for so many years, even the will to heal may fade. Sometimes we prefer to remain in the condition of sickness, forcing others to take care of us. It is sometimes also an excuse for not deciding what to do with our lives. Jesus instead takes this man back to his truest and deepest desire.

Indeed, this man replies in a more articulate way to Jesus’ question, revealing his true vision of life. He says first of all that he has no one to immerse him in the pool: so he is not to blame, but the others who do not take care of him. This attitude

becomes the pretext for avoiding responsibility. But is it really true that he had no one to help him? Here is Saint Augustine's enlightening answer: "Truly he had need of a 'man' to his healing, but that 'man' one who is also God. ... He came, then, the Man who was needed: why should the healing be delayed?" (*Tractate 17, 7*).

The paralytic then adds that when he tries to immerse himself in the pool, there is always someone who arrives before him. This man is expressing a fatalistic view of life. We think that things happen to us because we are not fortunate, because destiny is against us. This man is discouraged. He feels defeated in the struggle of life.

Instead, Jesus helps him to discover that his life is also in his hands. He invites him to get up, to raise himself up from his chronic situation, and to

take his stretcher (cf. v. 8). That mat is not to be left or thrown away: it represents his past of sickness, his history. Until that moment, the past had blocked him; it had forced him to lie like a dead man. Now it is he who can take that mat and carry it wherever he wishes: he can decide what to make of his history! It is a matter of walking, taking responsibility for choosing what road to take. And this is thanks to Jesus!

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord for the gift of understanding where our life is stuck. Let us try to give voice to our desire to be healed. And let us pray for all those who feel paralyzed, who do not see a way out. Let us ask to return to dwell in the Heart of Christ, which is the true house of mercy!

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