

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Mar 12th 2024

I want to be healed, but...

The Gospel today speaks about the miracle of Jesus at the pool of Bethzatha on a Sabbath Day. Some Bible scholars think this passage is an allegory. Today's liturgy makes us reflect on water as a sign of salvation.

The sick man stands for the people of Israel. The five porches represent the five books of the law. In those porches, the people lay ill. The law could show the people their sins but could never redeem them, it could uncover people's weaknesses but never cure them. The law, like the porches, sheltered the sick souls but could never bring healing. The 38 years could be explained as the 38 centuries of people waiting for the Messiah. The stirring of the waters stands for baptism. In early Christian art, baptism was presented with a man depicted as rising from the baptismal waters, carrying a bed upon his back.

The initiative for healing in today's Gospel comes from Jesus, and he asks: "Do you want to be healed?" And the answer is interesting: he doesn't say yes, but he complains about having no one to help him! "I don't have anyone to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed. While I'm about to go there – I'm about to decide – another gets there before me." He was asked if he wanted to be healed. The answer should have been, "Yes, I want to be healed!" But his response to Jesus' offer to heal is a complaint against others. And so, 38 years complaining about others and doing nothing to get better.

Jesus healed him, although he did not really ask for it. But his indecisiveness would continue. The author of the Gospel does not say whether he was happy or sad about his healing. Unlike other healing stories, he does not show any signs of happiness here. Instead, he continues to complain. "The one who healed me said to me. Take up your mat and walk." And later, he would go and tell the Jews that it was Jesus who healed him.

This happens in our lives too. People perceive only what they want to perceive. We are sometimes too preoccupied with our prejudices and convictions and refuse to appreciate the goodness and beauty in the people around us. Are we too critical of those who are more popular and successful than us and find faults with the situations and circumstances around us? It is time for us to appreciate a colleague for a good job done, instead of criticising them for being late in completing the assignment.