



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos into
the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg,
MD 21727**

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

O Lord, Not the Pool, but Thy Word Healed and Renewed...

May 23, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

O Lord, not the pool, but Thy word healed and renewed the paralytic; nor was he hindered by his infirmity of many years; for the might of Thy voice proved to be more effective. And he cast off his heavy burden and carried the weight of his bed as a testimony to the abundance of Thy compassions. Glory be to Thee! (From the Pentecostarion for the Sunday of the Paralytic – Gospel of John 5:1-15)

There are many people who approach the Faith like the man in Sunday's Gospel lesson. The poor quadriplegic in that lesson was taken down to the Pool of Bethesda where it was said that once every so often the waters in the pool would be stirred up by an angel, and whoever got into the water first would be healed. Obviously, there was no way in which a quadriplegic could jump into the waters before anyone else, so his plight was hopeless.

What a terrible situation it would have been. But not only for him, for all others who suffered paralysis of one sort or another: physical, spiritual, psychological. Only every so often, it was thought, would a bit of "magic" be thrown at them, and like some sort of high school gym class competition, the one who made it first would be healed.

We often approach the faith the same way. This or that bit of magic enabled by the “proper attitude” or by the presence of a holy object often leads people to a kind of superstitious “faith” rather than the faith of a disciple who sees the Hand of God Himself in every saving act. I have often said that we often treat God as a “genie” who waits for our command, ready to comply with the snap of our fingers under just the right circumstances, showing favor to some, but ignoring the request of others. We want to be the person who gets into that pool before others, so that our requests can be met. The quadriplegic in our story explained his plight in great detail to Jesus. Jesus asked him what the problem was, and instead of saying, “Lord help me,” or “Lord, heal me,” or “Lord, save me,” he gave a detailed explanation of how he could never make it to the pool in time to be healed by the magic waters. In response, Jesus gave him something way beyond his expectation: without testing the quality or quantity of the man’s faith, the Lord healed Him with a word; it was an act of pure compassion.

We hear this story a few weeks after Pascha precisely because it was appointed by the Holy Fathers to counter our misunderstanding. During the Great Feast of Pascha the new catechumens would have been baptized, and now it was time to reflect on what that meant. The Holy Fathers remind us in the hearing of this lesson that it is not this or that piece of magic we should be seeking, but the One Whose compassion was poured out upon them and upon us in Holy Baptism. We do not wait for a “seasonal” stirring of the waters, but we may come in every moment directly to the One Who freely gives the power of His Divine love to all who seek it. That’s what the Stichos from the Pentecostarion on Sunday means, when it says, “O Lord, not the pool, but Thy word healed and renewed the paralytic; nor was he hindered by his infirmity of many years; for the might of Thy voice proved to be more effective.”

Not the pool, nor this or that piece of perceived magic, or proper attitude, provides us with salvation. Not even the strength of our faith or belief. Not the adherence of this or that rule or canon. Only Christ, the means of our Creation and our Redemption, saves. Only Christ can and will give hope to the paralytic in the Gospel lesson and to us. Only Christ can remove the paralysis of our hearts, our souls and our minds.

Each and every one of us has been baptized. It is not the pool of Bethesda that saved the paralytic, but Christ. It is the declaration of forgiveness and our adoption as sons and daughters of the Father through our union with Christ that is our hope and our salvation. This is the reminder of the Sunday of the Paralytic. We look not to this or that snippet of magic, but to the One Who freely declares us Children of the Father and heirs of His Kingdom.

Fr. Elias

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