

SERMON OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III ON THE SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC MAN

“Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (John 5:14).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians

Today, the fourth Sunday after Easter, our Holy Church commemorates the healing of the paralytic man, whom the Lord miraculously healed at the Sheep’s Pool as St. John the Evangelist witnesses.

And the Hymn writer of the Church, referring to this wondrous healing, says: “At the sheep’s Pool, a man lay in sickness; and when he saw Thee, O Lord, he cried: I have no man, that when the water is troubles, he might put me therein. But when I go, another anticipateth me and receiveth the healing, and I lie yet in mine infirmity. And straight away, taking compassion on him, the Saviour saith unto him: for thee I became man, for thee I am clothed in flesh, and sayest thou: I have no man? Take up thy bed and walk” (Pentecostarion, Sunday of the Paralytic, Vespers, Entreaty, Glory).

In these words, we see the deepest meaning of the mystery of the Divine Providence, namely of the immense compassion and philanthropy of the Almighty God. And this is so, because the meaning of sin, whose result is death, does not have a simple moral or theoretical interpretation, but it refers to the natural illness of the body and soul.

Interpreting these words of the Lord, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14), St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "The Lord teaches thus, that the sins of men are not only recorded for the future judgement, but He also flogs us in various ways, while we are still in our bodies, before the great and illustrious day of the Great Judgement. The wise Apostle Paul also confirms that we quite often are in fault and grieve God: "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:30-32).

Commenting on Paul's words, Zigavinos says: "[Paul] has taught us here that many of the bodily illnesses have their root in sin; not only illnesses though, but also many deaths. For he calls death as sleep".

It is undeniable, my dear brethren, that God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ who became incarnate receiving human flesh for us, "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). And God "granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18) according to St. Luke the Evangelist.

And the life that God gave is the salvation of man from sin, namely his illness and infirmity. Behold why Christ is also called the healer of our souls and bodies, as St. Luke the Evangelist witnesses for Him in his Gospel: "And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox (Herod), Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke 13:32).

We also, my dear brethren, are called to this purpose, namely to our perfection in Christ our God the Resurrected from the dead, hearkening to our Saviour's advice: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

And along with the hymn writer let us say: "As befit His goodness, the Almighty appeared on earth, having become man from thine immaculate virgin womb; and he hath deified us, O blessed, all-pure, all-immaculate Theotokos" [through His Resurrection] (Pentecostarion, Midnight Service of the Sunday of Paralytic, Ode 7, theotokion). Amen! Christ is risen!"