



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAEHOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"The disease of sloth and the water that regenerates us"

Tuesday, 24 March 2020

[[Multimedia](#)]

Introduction

I have received the news in these days of several doctors and priests who have died and, I don't know if there were some nurses, who were infected, who caught this disease because they were serving the sick. Let us pray for them, for their families, and I thank God for the example of heroism of those who give themselves in caring for the sick.

Homily

Today's liturgy makes us reflect on water, water as a symbol of salvation, because it is a means of salvation, but water is also a means of destruction: think of the flood... But in these readings, water is for salvation.

In the first Reading (see *Ez* 47:1-9. 12), that water that leads to life, that heals the waters of the sea, a new water that heals. And in the Gospel (see *Jn* 5:1-16), the pool, that pool where the sick went, full of water, to heal themselves, because it was said that every now and then the waters moved, as if it were a river, because an angel descended from heaven to move them, and the first who threw themselves into the waters were healed. And so many sick people lay there: "In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame and crippled" (v. 3), waiting to be healed, waiting for the water to move.

There was a man there who had been ill for thirty-eight years - thirty-eight years there, waiting to be healed. This makes us think, doesn't it? It's a bit too long... because someone who wants to be healed arranges to have someone who helps him, he moves, he is quick, smart... But this man, thirty-eight years there, to the point that one doesn't know if he is ill or dead... "When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, He said to him, 'Do you want to be well?'" And the answer is interesting: he does not say yes, he complains. Of the illness? No. The sick man answers: "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me" (v. 7). Jesus says to him: "Rise, take up your mat, and walk" (v. 8). "Immediately the man became well" (v. 9).

That man's attitude makes us think. Was he sick? Yes, perhaps he had some form of paralysis, but it seems he could walk a little. But his heart was sick, his soul was sick, he was sick with pessimism, he was sick with sadness, he was sick with apathy. This is the disease the man had: "Yes, I want to live, but...", he was there. And his answer is not, "Yes, I want to be healed!" No, it was to complain: "The others arrive first, always the others". His answer to Jesus' offer to heal him is a complaint about others. And in this way, he spent thirty-eight years complaining about others. And he did nothing to heal himself.

It was a sabbath: we have heard what the doctors of the Law did (vv. 10-13). But the key is the encounter with Jesus, afterwards: "Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, 'Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you'" (v. 14). That man was in sin, not because he had done something grave, no: the sin of surviving and complaining about the life of others; the sin of sadness which is the seed of the devil, of that incapacity to make a decision about one's own life, and instead to look at the life of others so as to complain. Not to criticise them: to complain. "They go first, I am the victim of this life": complaints, they breathe complaints, these people.

If we make a comparison with the man blind from birth, which we listened to last Sunday (see *Jn* 9): with what joy, how decisively did he welcome his healing, and also with how much determination did he go to speak with the doctors of the Law! This [paralytic] merely went and informed them: "Yes, it is he". Period (see v. 15). Without engaging with life... He makes me think of many of us, of the many Christians who live in this state of apathy, incapable of doing anything but complaining about everything. And apathy is a poison, it is a fog that surrounds the soul and does not allow one to live. And it is also a drug, because if you taste it often enough, you come to like it. And you become addicted to sadness, addicted to apathy. It is like the air you breathe. And this is a rather habitual sin among us: sadness, apathy; I would not say melancholy, but it is close.

It will do us good to reread this chapter 5 of *John*, to understand this disease, to which we can all fall prey. Water is to save us. "But I cannot save myself" - "Why?" - "Because it is the fault of others". And I stay there for thirty-eight years... Jesus healed me: one does not see the reaction of the others who are healed, who take their mat and dance, sing, give thanks, tell all the world! No,

he just goes on. The others say to him that it should not be done, and he says, “The one who healed me said yes”, and goes on his way. And then, instead of going to Jesus, to thank Him and all, he informs: “It was He”. A grey life, but grey from this evil spirit that is apathy, sadness, melancholy”.

Let us think, of water, of that water that is the symbol of our strength, of our life, the water that Jesus used to regenerate us: Baptism. And let us think also of ourselves, if any of us are in danger of slipping into that apathy, into that “neutral” sin: the neutral sin is this, neither white nor black, one does not know what it is. And this is a sin the devil uses to annihilate our spiritual life and also our life as people. May the Lord help us understand how bad and how evil this sin is.

Prayer for spiritual communion

Let us make a spiritual communion:

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there, and I unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.