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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America - Homily for the Sunday of the Paralytic



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May 10, 2020

Saint George Greek Orthodox Church, Kingston, New York

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [and in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [and in response: Truly He is Risen!]

Today, we are coming to the virtual community of the Archdiocese from Kingston, New York, and the Saint George parish. The Trophy-bearer George is a great Saint for many reasons, but one in particular is that we acclaim him “ἀσθενούντων

ἰατρός” – the “physician of those who are sick.” Therefore, we add to our supplications today the prayers of Saint George the Great-Martyr, who fights for us against this pandemic and the costly toll it has taken on our world.

This Sunday is special for many reasons, not the least being that it is the traditional Mothers’ Day commemoration, when we remember our living mothers and those who have passed on. We wish them all the blessing of God, in this world and the next.

But we are also in a very significant part of the season of Πεντηκοστήριον, that Fifty Day Period from the Holy Pascha to the Feast of Pentecost. We have come from the celebration of the Resurrection, and the narratives of Thomas and the Myrrh-bearing Women, and arrived at the three consecutive Sundays on which we speak of water. In fact, each of these three Sundays: today’s Sunday of the Paralytic, next Sunday’s Samaritan Woman, and then the Sunday of the Man Born Blind – each of these has a special relationship to water, the water of Baptism.

This is because of the ancient practice of the Church of baptizing the Catechumens at the Liturgy of the First Resurrection – the Πρώτη Ἀνάσταση that we celebrate on Holy Saturday morning. After fasting and hearing the Catechetical lectures of the clergy during Lent, these Catechumens were finally admitted to the Mysteries of the Church on Holy Saturday evening through Baptism, Chrismation, and Holy Communion.

But did they understand every aspect of the Faith? Having repented and shown the willingness to take the **Kerygma** of the Church to heart – the Preaching of the Gospel, they received Baptism. Now they were ready to hear the **Dogma** of the Church, the inner teaching that would reveal the deeper meanings of the Sacraments they had experienced.

And so the Pool of Bethesda is our starting point to hear this teaching meant for the newly baptized, the ones called φωτιζόμενοι – “the illumined ones.” “Bethesda” means “House of Mercy,” so it is already clear what this pool of water would have immediately conveyed to them. The Paralytic who waits for the “movement of the water”[*] is an image of each Catechumen – held in the paralysis of sin – waiting for the operation of the Holy Spirit in the moment of their descent into the Baptismal Font.

And Christ asking the Paralytic, “Do you want to be healed?”[†] is the question every Christian must answer in his or her heart. Because the answer means that if we really do want to be healed from all the traumas of soul, heart, and mind, then

we must take up our cross, as the Lord commanded.[\[‡\]](#) For a Christian, there is no room for making an excuse like the Paralytic. He blamed someone else when he replied to the Lord, “I have no one” – ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω, and then rationalized his condition of illness.[\[§\]](#)

That is why the secret – the μυστικό, of this teaching is contained in **how** the Lord healed the Paralytic. He never put him in the water. Instead the Lord told him, “Arise, pick up your bed and walk.”[\[**\]](#) Three distinct commands.

First, “Arise” – enter into the light and life of the Resurrection.

Second, “Pick up your bed” – which means “Take up your cross, as the icons of this Feast so clearly show.

Third, “Walk” – which means “Follow Me,” or “Walk after Me.”[\[††\]](#) The life of Christ is our model for how to live: with love, compassion, forgiveness, and mercy.

Thus in this Gospel, the newly illumined Christians learned what the next steps were in their practical application of the Christian life. It’s not just about a Baptism that has already happened, whether in the immediate past or long ago. And we can learn the same lessons as well.

It also says in the Gospel of this day, that later on, the former Paralytic was challenged for carrying his bed on the Sabbath and then asked who told him to do so. But the man could not answer, for he did not know who Jesus was.[\[††\]](#)

And so it is, my friends, sometimes with us. We think we are doing what is right, but we do not recognize the Lord, either in His Church, or in each other.

My beloved Christians, our life in Christ is so much more than an event; it is a process, a life-long process that commences with our Baptism but it is never ending, because God is infinite.

Let us commit to that process today and every day. Let us be willing to arise every day and carry our cross, knowing that Someone Else died on it for our sakes. And let us follow Him, as the disciples we are called to be; in our intentions and our actions, that we may always praise and glorify God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[\[*\]](#) John 5:4.

[\[†\]](#) John 5:6.

[\[‡\]](#) Matthew 16:24.

[\[§\]](#) Cf. John 5:7.

[\[**\]](#) John 5:8.

[\[††\]](#) The Lord “called” his disciples with the invitation “Follow me” (Hebrew, *lech aharai*, “walk after me”), which was the common call of the itinerant teacher of the Torah.

[\[‡‡\]](#) Cf. John 5:9-13.

[Source](#)