

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel:

The angel brought me, Ezekiel, back to the entrance of the temple of the LORD, and I saw water flowing out from beneath the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the façade of the temple was toward the east; the water flowed down from the right side of the temple, south of the altar. He led me outside by the north gate, and around to the outer gate facing the east, where I saw water trickling from the right side. Then when he had walked off to the east with a measuring cord in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and had me wade through the water, which was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand and once more had me wade through the water, which was now knee-deep. Again he measured off a thousand and had me wade; the water was up to my waist. Once more he measured off a thousand, but there was now a river through which I could not wade; for the water had risen so high it had become a river that could not be crossed except by swimming. He asked me, "Have you seen this, son of man?" Then he brought me to the bank of the river, where he had me sit. Along the bank of the river I saw very many trees on both sides. He said to me, "This water flows into the eastern district down upon the Arabah, and empties into the sea, the salt waters, which it makes fresh. Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes the sea shall be made fresh. Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail. Every month they shall bear fresh fruit, for they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary. Their fruit shall serve for food, and their leaves for medicine."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9

***The Lord of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob.***

God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. Therefore we fear not, though the earth be shaken and mountains plunge into the depths of the sea.

***The Lord of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob.***

There is a stream whose runlets gladden the city of God, the holy dwelling of the Most High. God is in its midst; it shall not be disturbed; God will help it at the break of dawn.

***The Lord of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob.***

The LORD of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob. Come! behold the deeds of the LORD, the astounding things he has wrought on earth.

***The Lord of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob.***

GOSPEL: John 5:1-16

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

There was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 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?" The sick man answered him, "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." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." He answered them, "The man who made me well told me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who told you, 'Take it up and walk'?" The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there. After this 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." The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a sabbath.

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of Lent**

Both of today's readings have struck me as odd. Yes, I know they are scripture passages and as God's Word speak truth. As far as I know, Palestine has been a very dry place for millennia. It was in Ezekiel's time as it is today. Ezekiel's vision is of the Temple of Jerusalem and in Palestine. Where was he when he had it? Wasn't he in exile and living in Babylon? Weren't Jerusalem and the Temple in rubble? It seems to be a story of how water from the sanctuary of the Temple transformed the very salty Dead Sea into a fresh water lake. This vision is neither about water conservation nor geography. What or who needs this kind of make-over? What is this astounding transformation?

This is a type of biblical literature called apocalyptic. We can best approach it as we approach poetry. The elements of abundance, fruitfulness, freshness, healing and where it originates are keys to find meaning. The sanctuary of the temple had been the place of the Ark of the Covenant, which was God's throne on earth. God is the true origin of this event. Fresh water, in any extremely dry place is a gift. People need food and medicine to remain alive and healthy. This is the most dramatic element of this passage. The further away from the source, the more there is abundance, life and freshness.

For what did Ezekiel in Babylon long? To live near Jerusalem? The Temple? The Dead Sea? Or was it to know the presence of the Living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the land where he lived? Did he have a sense of God's life and providence like this vision showed? Is this passage a prophecy of a life to come, a life long gone or the life Ezekiel lived? Does this passage describe the richness of our lives that are now gifted by God? Don't we have to make sense out of our troubles as did Ezekiel? In writing this, did he look to the future for new life or did he experience it as he wrote and in gratitude for his descriptive words? How can we view God's presence as we live?

I've always wondered something when I've read this gospel. How did the lame man get himself to the healing pool of Bethesda if he couldn't walk? There was no handicapped accessible system of transport in Jerusalem in Jesus' day. Did the guy's family carry him? If they did, when did he get there? This happened on a Sabbath. Was he there since Friday before sunset? Had he been sitting there for thirty eight years? How did the healing happen? Was this some kind of spiritual spa?

Those who sought healing sat around the pool. From time to time the water stirred by itself. When that occurred, the first one in the pool could be healed. Palestine is a seismically active area. There are earthquakes from time to time. Wind or earth tremors were likely causes of the aqual agitation. Since the man couldn't walk, he needed someone to put him into the pool. He made a point to say that he was alone. Where were his family and friends?

Another thing about this; who were the people who interrogated the healed man? This was the Sabbath, the day to rest in God. People could walk the short distance and back from the temple or local synagogue. They would not be policing the area for it would violate the Sabbath rest. If they were there to observe the man carrying his mat they were as guilty as he was for performing unnecessary work on the Lord's Day.

Aside from these oddities, Jesus healed the man. Jesus carried on his mission regardless of Mosaic Law. There were some, other than the healed man, who knew of Jesus' abilities or knew of his reputation. They made the connection of the deed to him, with the man's help. As Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath." The mention of persecution that Jesus, faced because of the healing, has reminded us that Jesus was not, primarily, a healer but a savior who was to die upon the cross.

A little aside. I'm old enough to remember various prohibitions we once had as Catholics. No one would wash a car, cut the grass or go shopping on a Sunday. Such work was considered to violate our rest in God. However, if the basement flooded, a window would blow in or one had a flat tire, these needed prompt attention. A pressing need always could take president over the Sunday rest. There were such allowances in Judaism too. People in Jesus time would tend to their livestock and rescue them when they became endangered.

Ezekiel, as an exile, knew God's care in abundance. He was far from Jerusalem but near to God. Jesus' healed the lame man who had no where else to turn and no one else to help. In answer their prayers, God responded. Here we are; alive today. We know God is with us too. God seeks the way to us.

May the Spirit open our eyes to see God's movement into our hearts.

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