

Daily Gospel Reflection - March 24, 2020  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
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One of my friends from college has waged a mostly-losing battle with alcohol over the past 30 years. His addiction cost him his marriage, his career, and his physical health. He has, on the surface, done all the right things to fight the addiction. He joined AA, he has gone for inpatient treatment three times, he had read widely on the subject of addiction, and he was gone to countless counselors. But still...he kept drinking.

He kept drinking until last year, when another friend asked him a very direct question. He asked, "Do you want to be sober?"

At first, my friend reacted with anger. "Do I want to be sober? What kind of question is that? I've spent thousands of dollars on treatment! I've spent hours in AA meetings. I've spent years in therapy. I've lost my wife, my children, and my job to alcohol. Why would you ask me that?"

The other man simply repeated the question: "but...do you *want* to be sober?" And this became a moment of revelation, because my friend realized, for the first time in his life, that the answer was, "no."

He liked alcohol – or, at least, he believed that alcohol was doing something necessary in his life. This addiction had become so much a part of his life that he could not imagine what his life would be like without it. And, most importantly, alcohol was the numbing agent he was using to hide deeper pains – pains he simply did not want to deal with.

So, for the first time in his life, he realized the truth. Up to this point, he had *not wanted* to be sober. And when he realized that, it became the moment that his real healing could begin.

Jesus asks a straightforward question in today's Gospel. At first, Jesus' question may sound odd. Jesus meets a man who has been lying there near the healing pool of Bethesda... for a *very long time*. The Gospel tells us that he has been sick *for 38 years!* And, apparently, he has been coming to the healing pool for a very long time.

Jesus sees him and simply asks, "Do you want to be well?" And notice, the man does not give Jesus a straightforward yes or no answer. Instead, he gives Jesus a list of reasons why, up to this point, he could never get to the healing pool in time.

At which point, I want to say in my judgmental way, "Are you kidding? You've been sick for 38

years, you've been coming to this healing pool for a long time, and you STILL haven't figured out how to get to the front of the line? Sounds like a poor excuse to me!"

But thank goodness that this crippled man is now face to face, not with me, but with Jesus – Jesus who sees beyond our excuses to the deep truths of our hearts. Before this man is able to say anything else, Jesus says the word that brings hope and healing.

Christ is in our midst this Lent. Yes, Christ is in our midst in this, the strangest Lent we've ever experienced. And even though there are so many strange things going on in our world right now, Christ is still standing before us, asking us to be honest as we answer his straightforward question: "Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be well?"

At first, that may sound like a silly question to us. We can't turn on the news without hearing about sickness. We are changing our daily routine in radical ways in order to avoid a virus. We are spending lots of time inside to preserve our health. "Do I want to be healed? Do I want to be well? Of course I want to be healed!"

And if we are speaking to Jesus about a virus and a scary infection right now, of course, the answer is straightforward. *We all want to stay well.*

But the Gospel question may go even deeper than that. Jesus still asks, "Do you want to be well?" I blurt out, "Of course I do."

But *do* I?

Many of us have extra time at home right now. The interruption of our routine has caused us to look at our lives, our priorities, our decision, with a new lens. A parishioner called me the other day and said that she does not like being at home. I asked her why. And she said, "Because I can't run away from myself anymore. And I can't run away from the truth."

See is seeing, in a new way, some of the sinful patterns in her life. And she cannot run away from the fact that, up to this point, she hasn't wanted to change.

And I ask myself, "do I do the same thing?"

I 'pray' - "Lord, heal me of my lack of forgiveness." But, do I REALLY want to forgive? Or do I LIKE being angry, holding on to that grudge?

I 'pray' - "Lord, heal me of my impatience." But, do I REALLY want to be patient, or do I use that constant swirl of emotions to ignore deeper truths?

I 'pray' - "Lord, heal me...heal me of my addiction, my overeating, my overuse of TV, my shopping, my spending." But, do you REALLY want to be healed, or are you afraid that if those props are taken away, you may have to confront some deeper truth about your self?

We 'pray' - "Lord, make me whole." But, do we really want that, or have we *settled for less*, afraid of what might happen if we truly listen to God and take Christ seriously?

The Lord is able to do all things, in us, and for us. Perhaps, this Tuesday of this very strange Lent, we need to ponder the question Jesus asks: "Do you want to be well?" Do you want the power of God unleashed in your life?

Or have you become content to sit by the pool, settling for less?

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