



# THE VOICE OF SAINT MARK

*Podcast of the Coptic Orthodox Tradition*

Parish of Saint John the Theologian – Dijon

Episode:

## The Paralytic

*Gospel of John 5:1–18 | 5th Sunday of Great Lent*

*Coptic Orthodox Tradition*

### Episode Presentation

For thirty-eight years, a man has been lying by the side of a pool. He waits. He watches the water stir, yet can never be the first to enter. He does not yet know that the one passing by that day has come especially for him.

In this Lenten homily, we contemplate the Gospel of the Paralytic through the lens of penance, conversion, and interior renewal. Not merely an outward healing — but a resurrection of the soul.

What do the thirty-eight years of waiting represent? What is the meaning of that cry: *"I have no one"*? And why does Christ ask this strange question: *"Do you want to be healed?"*

A meditation drawn from the Fathers of the Church — Saint Macarius the Great, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Saint Anthony the Great, Saint Athanasius the Apostolic — to accompany us through this season of Lent, with a simple invitation: to rise, take up our mat, and enter into a new life.

**Let us now hear the Holy Gospel:**

### Gospel of John 5:1–18

- 1** After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
- 2** Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.
- 3** In these lay a multitude of invalids — blind, lame, and paralyzed.
- 4** For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.
- 5** One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.
- 6** When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him: "Do you want to be healed?"
- 7** The sick man answered him: "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."
- 8** Jesus said to him: "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."

**9** And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

**10** So the Jews said to the man who had been healed: “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”

**11** But he answered them: “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’”

**12** They asked him: “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’”

**13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

**14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”

**15** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

**16** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

**17** But Jesus answered them: “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

**18** This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

## Homily

✠ *In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
Amen. ✠*

You know that when Lent was first instituted, in the earliest centuries of Christianity, it was above all a preparation for baptism given at Pascha. It is therefore not surprising that the last three Sundays of this season are placed under the sign of water.

The water that points to baptism, of course. Last Sunday, it was the water of the Samaritan Woman — the woman at the well, and her living water. Today, the water of the Paralytic. And next Sunday, the blind man, and the pool of Siloam.

This Gospel of the Paralytic illustrates once again, during this season of Lent, the attitude that ought to be ours with regard to penance, conversion, repentance, and the total renewal of our being.

What strikes us first is the selfishness and the indifference of this crowd of sick people gathered under five colonnades, waiting for the healing of only one. The number five is not without meaning: five is the number of man, for it points to our five senses — those very senses through which the heart communicates with the outside world, and through which we also sin. And what do we see? We see a humanity turned in upon itself. Each one waits for his own healing. But no one, no one turns toward the other. We find ourselves in a society of every man for himself that is not unlike our own.

And this is what wrings from the paralytic that cry of despair: “I have no one.” This pool is called Bethesda — which means “house of mercy.” It stands near the Temple of Jerusalem.

For thirty-eight years, then, crowds of faithful and priests have walked past this man without ever doing anything.

But this pool is also an image of the Church. And these waters stirred by the Holy Spirit are those which should give baptism. Yet we must honestly acknowledge that all too often, we come to church for ourselves. For our own personal salvation, selfishly — like those sick people at the pool, centered only on their own healing.

Yet salvation cannot be individual. It is accomplished in the Church, in the community of brothers — and of saints and angels too. It is accomplished by turning first toward God, imploring the forgiveness of our sins. And this is the whole meaning of Lent — a work not individual but collective, a work of the Church. If it were an individual work, we could reduce it to a simple diet. No: Lent is a work of the Church.

In this Gospel, sickness — and in particular the sickness of the paralytic — is only the visible manifestation of an invisible reality: the sickness of the soul. Saint Macarius the Great tells us: “The soul that has fallen into sin is like a paralyzed body. It sees the good, but cannot accomplish it without grace.”

Yes, sin is a sickness. The sickness of a heart that no longer loves. The sickness of a soul that no longer prays. The sickness of a will incapable of rising up. And this man, this paralytic, is quite clearly each one of us. The paralytic is above all paralyzed spiritually by his sins. Healing, therefore, can only be spiritual.

That is why the command given by Christ — to rise and walk — must be understood not only literally, but in the sense of standing upright and walking in justice and righteousness. The true and authentic new man has appeared in the person of Christ. Christ is our measure. He is our absolute reference.

Here is a fundamental element: this man asks nothing of Christ. He does not even know who he is. How could he ask him anything? And yet, Christ comes to him. The Christ does not heal only those who seek him — he comes himself to those who are incapable of coming to him, as Saint Cyril of Alexandria tells us. God always takes the initiative. He comes personally to the isolated and suffering man, to share his sufferings and his life. This is the whole mystery of the Incarnation.

It should be noted that Jesus had made the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to attend a feast. In truth, he had come especially to heal this sick man — and equally all the sick. And that is the feast. Christ became incarnate to save me personally. Just as he became incarnate to save each of you personally.

**Rise up:** *"Get up, take up your bed."* — Rise up from your fall. Stand upright before God.

**Take up your mat:** *"Take up your bed."* — Assume your past, now transfigured by grace.

**Walk:** *"Walk."* — Enter into a new life. This is more than a healing — it is a resurrection.

“Do you want to be healed?” This question does not come from one who wishes to impose anything. God always respects the freedom of man. It is prompted by a true love, an authentic compassion. Of course, sometimes we grow accustomed to our paralysis. We settle

into our sins. We justify our weaknesses. We give up the struggle. But Christ does not force us. He awaits our response. And the response to this love is conversion.

When man responds, even poorly, even imperfectly, Christ acts. And Saint Anthony the Great tells us, speaking from his own experience: “He who lies down in negligence cannot be healed. But to the one who strives, God gives strength.”

Later, Jesus finds this man again in the Temple and says to him: “Sin no more, lest something worse befall you.” You see: healing is not the end — it is the beginning. Repentance is not a moment; it is an entire life. It is a continual renewal of the heart. And Lent is precisely this time of renewal.

Finally, this miracle becomes a scandal. Why? Because Christ reveals who he is: “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” The Judeans see in this only a profanation of the Sabbath and blasphemy — the two chief charges that will be brought against him at his trial.

And it is Saint Athanasius the Apostolic who proclaims: “The Word of God became man so that man might receive life and be raised up from his corruption.” The miracle of the man raised from his paralysis becomes a figure of the healing of all humanity by Christ — the crucified and risen Christ.

This Gospel reveals three essential things for Lent:

1. Christ comes to us, even when we are incapable of coming to him.
2. True healing is above all spiritual. Penance and confession are the path to freedom.
3. Healing is not the end — it is the beginning. Grace makes us new men, called to walk in justice and righteousness.

We all come with our paralysis: our weariness, our sins, our despair. But if we respond to this love — even poorly, even imperfectly — Christ acts. He says to each of us: “Rise, take up your mat, and walk.”

And so, especially in this season of Lent, Christ awaits us. He awaits us in prayer, in repentance, in fasting, in the sacraments of the Church. He asks each of us the same question: “Do you want to be healed?” Let us answer him, and let him raise us up.

**✠ To Christ our God, rich in mercy, be glory and praise with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen. ✠**