



DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *John 5:1-15*

"Rise, take up your pallet, and walk."

Fr. George Parsenios



The Paralytic who is healed in today's Gospel reading is a puzzling figure. After he is healed, we are left wondering: does he become a disciple or will he be a traitor? When other people are healed by Jesus, they show their loyalty to him in obvious ways. But the Paralytic does not worship Jesus. He does not thank Jesus. He does not follow Jesus. The only thing he does after being healed is to tell the leaders of the Jews that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. In the very next line, these same leaders pursue Jesus with a violent intensity. Was the Paralytic, then, a disciple or an informant? We cannot be sure. The matter is left ambiguous. Is our loyalty to Jesus equally uncertain? We call ourselves Christians, but would the people who encounter us each day know that we are Christians? Would our Christian character be obvious? Or would it be ambiguous? Would the cashier at the grocery store consider us cruel and rude? Or kind and gracious? How do we spend our money? A checkbook is a theological document. What does it say about our Christian commitment? And our homes and families—are they havens of kindness or places of anger and neglect? If we are honest, we will see in our Christian life vast gray areas where our Christian devotion is less than clear. We cannot be perfect. But we do need to show progress. As we move through this radiant period in the Church's calendar, let us strive with ever greater commitment and focus to say not only in words but in actions: *Χριστός Ανέστη! Christ is Risen!*

Fr. George Parsenios is Professor of New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. www.hchc.edu

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Diakonia is made possible by a generous grant from Leadership 100

FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Ekklesia (Ἐκκλησία)

What is “Church?”

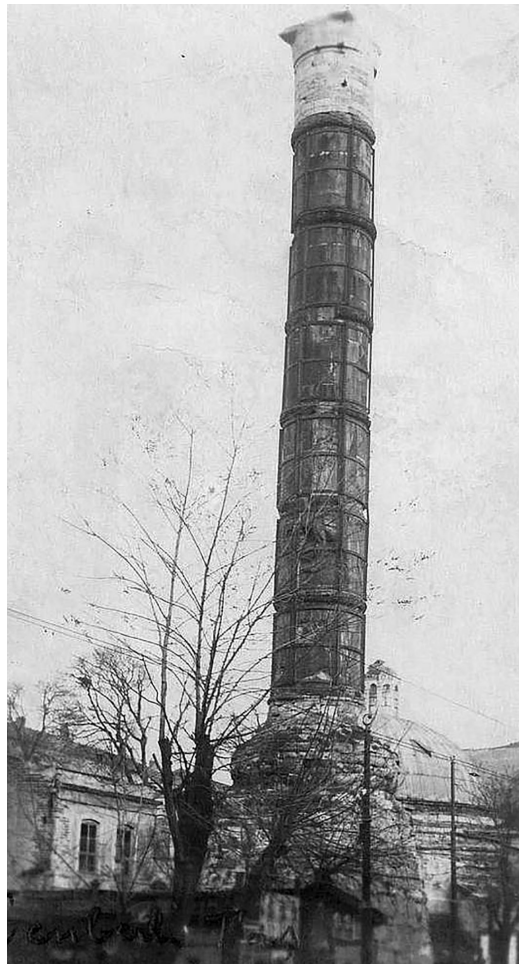
Fr. George Parsenios



The Greek word for “Church” is *ἐκκλησία/ekklesia*, so anything related to Church life is called “ecclesiastical.” But the term *ἐκκλησία/ekklesia* had a long history before it entered the Christian vocabulary. The word derives from the verb *ekkaleo*, which means “I summon.”

Homer, therefore, called a gathering of the Greek soldiers at Troy an *ekklesia*. More famous still, the democratic assembly where the citizens of Ancient Athens gathered to vote was called the *Ekklesia*. Most Greek cities had such an *ekklesia*.

The term entered biblical language when the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. The people of ancient Israel met in various kinds of gatherings, and the Greek translators of the Old Testament called such a meeting an *ekklesia* (see Deut 31:30). When Christians formed congregations in their own cities, they chose this biblical name for their communities. The word *ekklesia* stresses that Christians are called forth (*ekkaleo*) and summoned by God with a heavenly calling (Eph 4:1). Christian churches are not merely human assemblies, convened to debate political matters. They are God’s churches, guided by a heavenly mission. St. Paul, for this reason, refers to them as “the *ekklesia* of God” (1Cor 1:2).



THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

May 11, 330–The Founding of Constantinople

In the fourth century, the Emperor Constantine saw the need for a new imperial capital connecting the Eastern and Western parts of the empire. In 324, he chose the ancient city of Byzantium as the capital. Tradition tells us that Constantine marked the city’s boundaries by walking with a spear. His advisors were surprised by how large the city was becoming and asked him when he would stop. Constantine answered, “When the one walking ahead of me stops,” implying that God was guiding him. Icons of this event often show an angel leading him as he traced the borders of the new capital. Building began in 325, and beautiful monuments from across the empire were brought to decorate the city. On May 11, 330, Constantine officially dedicated the new capital, Constantinople, placing it under the protection of the Theotokos. It became the heart of a Christian empire that lasted for a thousand years.

The Column of Constantine in Çemberlitaş, comprises six cylindrical marble pieces held together with metal rings. It was taken from the Temple of Apollo in Rome to Constantinople in 330 A.D., on the order of Constantine I, to celebrate the new capital of the empire. (public domain)

THE SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC

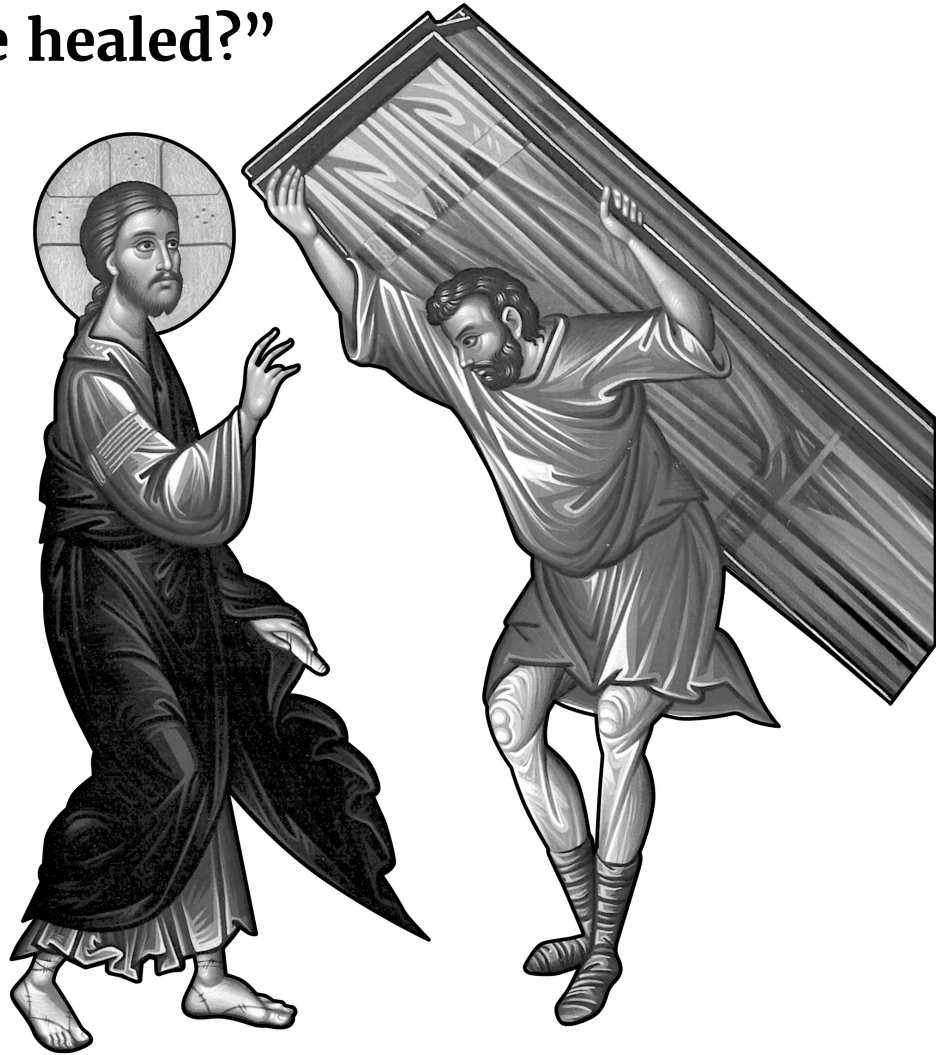
“Do you want to be healed?”

Near the Sheep’s Gate in Jerusalem was a pool where the sick would gather, waiting for the water to stir. The first person to step in would be healed. On this fourth Sunday of Pascha, we read in the Gospel of John that Jesus sees a man there who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years, unable to reach the water. Jesus asks the man a simple yet powerful question: “Do you want to be healed?” The man answers honestly: he has no one to help him into the pool when the water is stirred. Jesus tells him, “Rise, take up your bed, and walk.” Immediately, the man is healed.

This story is not only about physical healing. It is about being transformed. The word healed in this passage has been translated in several ways. Some say, “healed.” Some say, “made whole.” According to Father George Parsenios, New Testament Professor at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, the most literal translation is “Do you want to be made healthy?” Fr. George explains, “The Gospel of John is focused more on spiritual than physical healing. When Jesus performs miracles, they all point to the transformation we receive in the new life in Christ.”

In the Epistle reading for this Sunday, we hear of a similar moment in Acts, when Peter tells a paralyzed man named Aeneas, “Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” Healing is not only personal. It becomes a witness to others.

The question of Jesus still speaks to us today: *Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be whole? Do you want to be TRANSFORMED?* The healing that Jesus brings also asks something of us—it calls us to receive new life in Jesus Christ.



Icon of the Sunday of the Paralytic

In the icon of the Sunday of the Paralytic, Jesus is shown blessing the paralytic after he has taken up his bed. He bows toward Jesus in reverence and in gratitude.



YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

This week, prayerfully reflect on how you may be spiritually or emotionally paralyzed. Ask Jesus for healing. Ask Him for transformation. Take concrete steps through prayer, repentance, reconciliation, or an act of faith, to rise and walk with Him.



Sunday of the Paralytic

Help Christ reach the Paralytic
so He can help him 'rise, take
up his pallet, and walk'!



Just For Kids!

(...and the young at heart)