

Pastoral Reflection for May 2025: The Healing Ministry of Christ continued after

Pentecost: Three Sundays of Pascha are devoted to the healing ministry of Christ: the Sundays of the Paralytic, the Samaritan Woman, and the Blind Man. They bracket the Midfeast of Pentecost when we look back to the Resurrection and forward to the Feast of Pentecost – the Descent of the Holy Spirit. In each of these events, Christ takes the initiative to approach individuals and offer healing both physical and spiritual even though they are at the margins of society: the paralytic who lies by the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years ignored by those around him (John 5:1-15); the Samaritan woman, for whom Jews had great animosity and who comes to the well to draw water at the heat of day rather than with the other women in the morning (John 4:5-42); and the man born blind who has been reduced to living as a beggar (John 9:1-32). The events of these Sundays look back to the Resurrection because they remind us that Christ's suffering, death and resurrection are an extension and fulfillment of the compassion and love of his healing ministry while He lived among us.

Yet after His Resurrection, He ascends into heaven. Matthew (28.17) notes that even some of the disciples had doubts or perplexities about Christ after His Resurrection. In contrast to the Theotokos, the Apostles are portrayed in the Icon for the Ascension in a state of some disarray. So, for all of those who were healed by and drawn into a communion with Christ during His life, what happens when He departs? Will they be abandoned or only "gain access" to Christ at a distance? Christ himself gives the answer when He meets the Samaritan woman: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4.23-24). The Spirit is the Comforter whom Christ promised to the disciples but only if He departed from this earth (John 16:7).

The Holy Spirit unites the Theotokos, the disciples and all of us in the Body of Christ (the Church). As St John Chrysostom writes: "The Church is a hospital for souls. She does not condemn on behalf of sins, but grants remission of sins. In the Church, the joyful sustain their joy. In the Church, those worried acquire merriment, and those saddened, joy. In the Church, the troubled find relief, and the heavy-laden, rest." In the Church, we are graced with the sacraments which are made possible through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. The aim of this: to draw us, everyone, into deification: the complete fullness of our lives united with God at the general resurrection. Indeed, even those who have departed their life in Christ are now drawn into a "place of brightness, a place of refreshment, a place of repose, where all sickness, sighing, and sorrow have fled away." (Orthodox Funeral Service)

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