

In the readings from Acts and the Gospel of John, there are the healings of two paralytics, one by Jesus Himself, and one by Jesus through Peter. And there is the raising of a woman name Tabatha from the dead. Imagine how stunned everyone must have been to have witnessed these things. Imagine the joy, perhaps with mixed feelings of fear, in the face of it all. Miracles, such as these, however, are passing. Tabitha died again, as did Lazurus, Jairus' daughter, and the widow's only son, all of whom Jesus had raised from the dead. The sick, such as these paralytics, who were healed, did not remain in good health forever.

In the Gospel of John, as you probably know, the miracles that Jesus performs are not called miracles, but are called, "signs". The paralytics and Tabitha are raised from their beds. This is, without a doubt, a sign of what is to come, which is to be raised from our graves in the resurrection to eternal life. All

of the miracles of Jesus, whether healings, multiplying bread, walking on water or calming the sea, are all about eternal life. Their true meaning is only in light of the resurrection. This is how we should see, not only miracles, but the meaning and purpose of our entire life here on earth. What good is it to be healed, or even raised from the dead, if we are only to return to that state, if there is nothing more? But there is more, far more. These miracles are signs that we can see, of things we cannot see, and which are to come.

We sometimes forget this when we think of miracles, particularly, physical healings, like that of the paralytic. In the midst of our bodily suffering and sickness, we are often preoccupied with finding relief and being cured. We naturally tend to put a great deal of energy and effort behind it, and we earnestly beg God for His help. This is perfectly understandable, and good, but we are often less concerned

about our soul, than we are about our body. Do we not often tend to tolerate spiritual sickness more than bodily ills?

Jesus' miracles and physical healings are intended to impart to us the knowledge of salvation and eternal life. They are to encourage the repentance of sin, so that, as He said to the paralytic, something worse may not overtake us. He wants us to have faith in Him, that we might be saved. Jesus was sent by God the Father for this purpose alone.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16–17).*

The physical cure we may so ardently desire for our body today, will pass away tomorrow when we die. The cure of our soul, however, will endure forever in eternity! Our Lord, in His infinite love, wants nothing less for us than to believe in Him so that we "*should not perish but have eternal life*" (Jn

3:17). Unless we understand this, a cure like that of the paralytic, even if it was miraculously achieved, is no more effective, or that different, than a doctor today who cures a patient. The doctor's concern is with restoring the body, not the soul, but God is concerned with both. But what good is it if we keep our body in good health, but leave our soul languishing in the sickness of sin? Jesus says,

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mk 8:37).

Our Lord cares about our bodily ills and physical sufferings, and all the anxieties, sadness, and troubles of this life. But He knows, better than any of us, that there are far worse things. There is something far more painful and it is without end. We can be certain, then, that the healing of the paralytic was not simply about curing a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years.

The Lord cares about our difficulties and struggles in this life; and He cares about our bodies too. He has promised to raise our bodies up in the resurrection. What good is that, however, if we are raised to condemnation rather than to eternal life?

In this life, as you all know, we will suffer and die. It may feel, at times, that the Lord does not care about our situation. He cares more about it than we do, and knows more about it than we do, and He does for us that which will lead us to heaven. Jesus is not without compassion for us here and now. When Lazarus' sister, Mary, came to Jesus and fell at His feet, weeping over her brother's death, scripture says that Jesus was "...deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (John 11:33). And when He came to Lazarus' tomb, it says, "Jesus wept. So, the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!'".

The miracles that Jesus performs are signs of His deep compassion, but this compassion extends far beyond what is seen, to that which is unseen. This is the forgiveness of our sins and the healing and transformation of our soul unto eternal life. The miracles that our Lord performs are of His infinite compassion and love, but a greater compassion and love for us than we know. He has our greatest and everlasting good in mind.

Can we begin to see that miracles are never ends in themselves. Rather, they are like street signs or guideposts along the way, that give directions to travelers. The miraculous sign, like the guidepost, is not the destination. The destination is faith in Jesus Christ, which leads to eternal life in Him. This is how we are to understand miracles; they are signs, they point to something greater, far beyond themselves.

Consider the healing of another paralytic in the Gospel of Luke.

Men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they sought to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into their midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” (Lk 5:18–20).

Now, naturally, the Pharisees and teachers of the law objected to this, saying, “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” Jesus does not debate them, but answers their question by showing them a miraculous sign.

Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed— “I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home.” And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen amazing things today” (Lk 5:23–26).

This miracle, as with all miracles that Jesus works, are never ends in themselves. The man’s healing, which all could see, is a sign of what they could not see, the forgiveness of this man’s sins. There are many examples of this in Scripture. Jesus says, “I am the light of the world” and then performs a miraculous sign by giving light to the eyes of a blind man. The miraculous healing of the blind man, which they could see, was a sign of what they could not see, which was that Jesus is *light*, the divine light of the world (John 9).

Jesus comes walking on water towards them. Water is a natural symbol of life and death. We cannot live without water, but water is also dangerous and can kill us. The miracle of walking on water, which they could see, is a sign of what they could not see, that being God, Jesus holds absolute power over life and death.

The *purpose* of these miraculous signs, however, is to give us reason to believe in Him, and in believing, that we may have life in him. John, at the end of his Gospel, says this about the miraculous signs that Jesus performed:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20:30–31).

Jesus performs a miraculous sign, and people come to believe because of it. In the case of the paralytic, Jesus did not ask the man for his faith, that is, if he believed, but He healed him as an invitation to believe and turn from his sins. Miracles are reasons to believe, to come to faith in Jesus, a faith that leads away from sin and death, to life in his name.

These miraculous signs continued with the Apostle's preaching of the Gospel, as we see in the reading from the

Acts of the Apostles. Jesus, through Peter, heals a paralytic and people turn to the Lord.

Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and *they turned to the Lord* (Ac 9:32–35).

There have been thousands of miraculous signs since the time of the Apostles and many of them are documented and verified. The canonization of someone as a saint, for example, while it requires that the person possess heroic virtue, that is, holiness of life, there must also be verified miracles through their intercessory prayers. These miraculous signs are investigated by doctors and scientists who are not necessarily Catholic or even Christian. Miraculous signs in recent history, which are quite significant, are Knock Ireland, Fatima, Lourdes and others.

Although a miraculous sign may be powerful, even irrefutable in itself, everyone remains free to choose to

believe in Jesus or to reject Him. This is exactly what we see in the life of Jesus. Thus, the miraculous signs that our Lord performs are *reasons* to believe. They are not *proofs* that we are to have faith in Jesus, like a scientist who performs an experiment. Faith is a supernatural gift that is poured into our souls, by which we believe what God has revealed. It is important to recall, again, the definition of faith in the letter to the Hebrews.

Faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *conviction* of things not seen (Heb 11:1).

Supernatural faith is an interior assurance and a conviction, which is given to us, not something we achieve. Faith is a kind of indirect knowledge and experience of the things that God has revealed through His Church.

The lesson here for us in our spiritual life is that we do not base our faith on miraculous signs, or anything else, but on

the very person of Jesus Christ alone. The temptation, however, is to look for spiritual experiences, consolations, or even extraordinary phenomena, instead of seeking the Lord Himself, and for His own sake.

The day after Jesus had miraculously fed the five-thousand, the people came looking for him (John 6:22ff). But it wasn't Jesus that they sought, but bread. Jesus said to them,

Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves (John 6:26).

And then He admonishes them.

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you (John 6:27).

We can, and should ask the Lord for good things, but we should trust the Lord to decide what we need and what to do for us. Our place is only to seek *Him*, that is, to have faith in Him and to love Him.

The healing of the paralytic is a reason to believe, but it is not faith itself. It is a visible sign of an invisible reality, that the Lord raises up our soul from sin, and will raise up our bodies on the last day to eternal life in His Holy Resurrection.

In the words of the kontakion of the paralytic:

O Lord, with your divine authority, as you once raised the paralytic, now raise my soul, paralyzed dreadfully with all kinds of sin and disgraceful deeds, that, being saved, I may cry out to you: Glory to your power, O merciful Christ. Amen.

Christ is Risen!