

But I Asked to Be Healed

From My Wheelchair, I Witness Miracles and Ask, "Why Not Me?"

By Bill Zalot

Jesus healed people. Some were healed of paralysis, others of blindness. As a man with spastic cerebral palsy, who uses a wheelchair for mobility, I am deeply moved by those stories.

Jesus, bring Your healing. How many times have you or I asked Our Lord that favor — for friends, for relatives or for ourselves? Each time I've asked for my own healing, He's whispered, "In the broken, I show My glory."

I remember when my friend Nancy took me to St. Agnes Church in West Chester, Pa. A few men carried me up several flights of steps. I knew how the paralytic must have felt in Luke 5:17-26. I can almost hear his friends saying, "If this doesn't work, we'll break our backs for nothing." In fact, that's what Nancy's friends said. And, indeed, I wasn't healed that night.

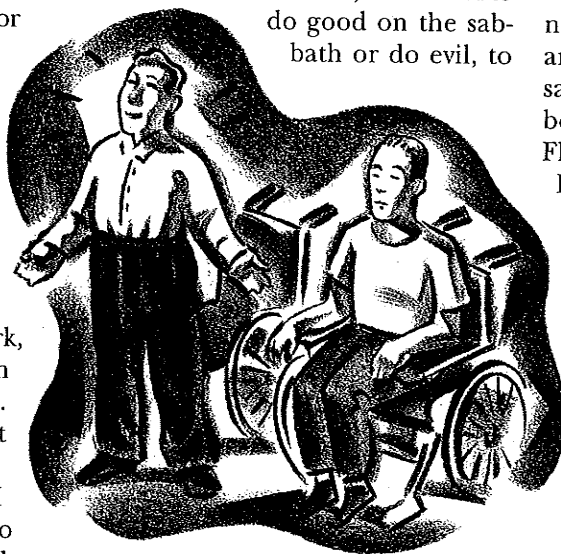
I empathize with the paralytic. I also feel for his friends. It's awkward to be the man lifted; it's a strain to be the men who are carrying.

I feel a different kinship with the paralytic at the gate in John 5:1-18. He waited years to have someone help him to reach the healing waters when they were stirred up by a healing angel. The pool was just beyond his grasp. By the time he reached the water's edge, the ripples had settled. I can't say whether the stillness actually made a difference in the water's healing power, or if he had a self-imposed barrier to physical healing. But if the water really did need to be stirred, I would not have reached it in time, either. I've never been accused of being "speedy." My spastic body wouldn't let it happen.

The legalistic minds of the day were

furious that this paralytic's healing took place on a feast day. Yet Jesus scandalized them in this way again and again. In Luke 13:10-17, a woman is cured of a crippling condition on the Sabbath. Stooped over with disease, she just wanted relief. And, Jesus healed her.

Another Sabbath healing was that of the man with the withered hand, recorded in Mark 3:1-6. Jesus said to the onlookers, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath or do evil, to



save life or destroy it?" Mark goes on to report that "He grieved at their hardness of heart."

I rejoice when I see others cured at a healing Mass. Yet I ask Jesus, "Why couldn't it be me, too?" I never wanted someone not to be healed. I identify with the man with the withered hand because, since a healing service in New Orleans in 1987, Jesus *has* greatly reduced my spasms. And this healing took place on a Sunday!

God can work with power when an assembly of His people are united in prayer. So, sure, healings can take place on holy days or the Sabbath. Many Catholics return to the Church during Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter every

year. Isn't each of these returns a healing — a spiritual healing?

Think of the woman at the well, or Mary of Magdala. These women's lives were changed. They were healed, and then they evangelized. They shared the Good News with all they met. Their stories witness to people to this day. Their spiritual healing began with forgiveness. It led to true conversion.

I look for an answer as to why I have not been healed. I don't know why, but I am comforted by the fact that many saints suffered long illnesses without being healed. St. Thérèse the Little Flower, Blessed Margaret Castello and Blessed Faustina were not healed in their time on earth. And I am not as virtuous as they.

I am not saying I will never be healed. But I am content to live out this life with a disability in reparation for my own sins and the sins of others. It may give me less time in purgatory. I offer the time I spend in my wheelchair as indulgences for my sin.

I have come to believe that acceptance is a healing in itself. Gradually, I've learned to use my physical limitations for the gift they were intended to be.

In this light, I know Jesus has answered me affirmatively. His gift of my acceptance of my disability is a testimony to that reality.

Bishop Fulton Sheen often noted that some people, like the thief on Jesus' left, ask to be taken down from their cross, while others, like the thief on His right, ask to be lifted up.

May we who have visible crosses never despair, but realize: "On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed" (Is 53:5). ■

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