

Catechism Story 36

*The Sacrament of Holy Baptism
Memory Verse and Catechism Prayers from the Congregation at Prayer*

BIBLE STORY: THE POOL OF BETHESDA

John 5:1-15

Central Thoughts

- Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, and not by our works.
- The Word of God is what gives Holy Baptism the power to save.
- Jesus is the source of the forgiveness of sins, and the rescue from death and the devil that we receive in baptism.
- Holy Baptism is the place of God's grace and mercy because we receive Jesus in our baptism.
- Catechesis after our baptism preserves and keeps us in our baptismal faith and life.

Discussion Questions

NOTE: The Temple in Jerusalem had a gate on the north side of the outdoor complex where the sheep for sacrifice would enter to be washed or sanctified in the pool before they were offered up. Bethesda means "house of grace" or "house of mercy" and by its name taught the significance of the Temple liturgy. The true source of grace and mercy is Jesus to whom this miracle points. The five porches or colonnades which were a part of the pool were so numbered to remind one of the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch or the Torah) which contained the divine liturgy of the Temple and which Jesus came to fulfill.

Why were the multitude of sick people, blind, lame, and paralyzed, waiting for the movement of the water in the Pool of Bethesda?

They were waiting for an angel to stir the water so that those who entered the water would be made well.

What is an angel?

An angel is a messenger of God's Word.

If the water did, indeed, have power to heal the sick, how can water do such great things?

"Certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water" gave the water the power to heal and restore the sick to health.

How long had the crippled man at the pool suffered with his infirmity?

For thirty-eight years.

How did Jesus demonstrate His omniscience and His compassion?

He knew that the man had been there for a long time and asked him if he wanted to be made well?

What did the man confess to Jesus?

He was powerless to help himself and had no one to put him into the pool when the angel stirred the water, so another person would always enter the pool ahead of him.

What did Jesus say to the man?

"Rise, take up your bed and walk."

How was the man healed?

He was healed by the power of Jesus' Word.

What does this teach us about Holy Baptism?

Jesus is the One at work in the water of baptism. The power of Holy Baptism to "work forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation to all who believe" is in Jesus' Word. He is the source of salvation that the waters of baptism offer.

Why does the Apostle John tell us that it was the Sabbath day on which the man was healed?

He reminds us that "sabbath" or "rest" comes from Christ and His Word alone.

What did the Jews object to?

That the man carried his bed on the Sabbath.

How does the man respond to the Jews?

The Man who made him well told him to take up his bed and walk, so he followed Jesus' Word.

What does this teach us about the Sabbath?

The Sabbath is about hearing the Word of God, receiving it, believing it, and acting according to it. This is how the Sabbath day is made holy when we receive God's holy Word and lead holy lives according to it. The Sabbath is not about the work that we do, but it is about the work that Christ does for us and that He gives us through His Word.

How does the man's condition and Jesus' action illustrate salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone?

The man was totally helpless and could do nothing to save himself. Jesus healed him by His saving Word, apart from any merit or worthiness in him, and the man received Jesus' Word by faith.

How does the man's initial ignorance of who the Man was who healed him correspond to what happens in the baptism of infants and children?

An infant may not yet know the name of Jesus or have been fully catechized in the Christian faith, and yet he or she receives the saving benefits of Holy Baptism. The catechesis that follows the baptism of children and adults fills up their understanding and ability to confess the mystery of baptism into Christ and all the benefits that Jesus gave them in their baptism.

How did Jesus catechize the man after he was healed?

He found the man, told him about himself, and encouraged the man to live in repentance and faith, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

What does Jesus' word, "sin no more" mean?

It means that he should continue to believe in Jesus and follow Him, rather than turn away from Jesus back to a life of unbelief and sin.

What did the man confess after Jesus' catechesis?

That it was Jesus who had made him well.

What does this teach us about Holy Baptism?

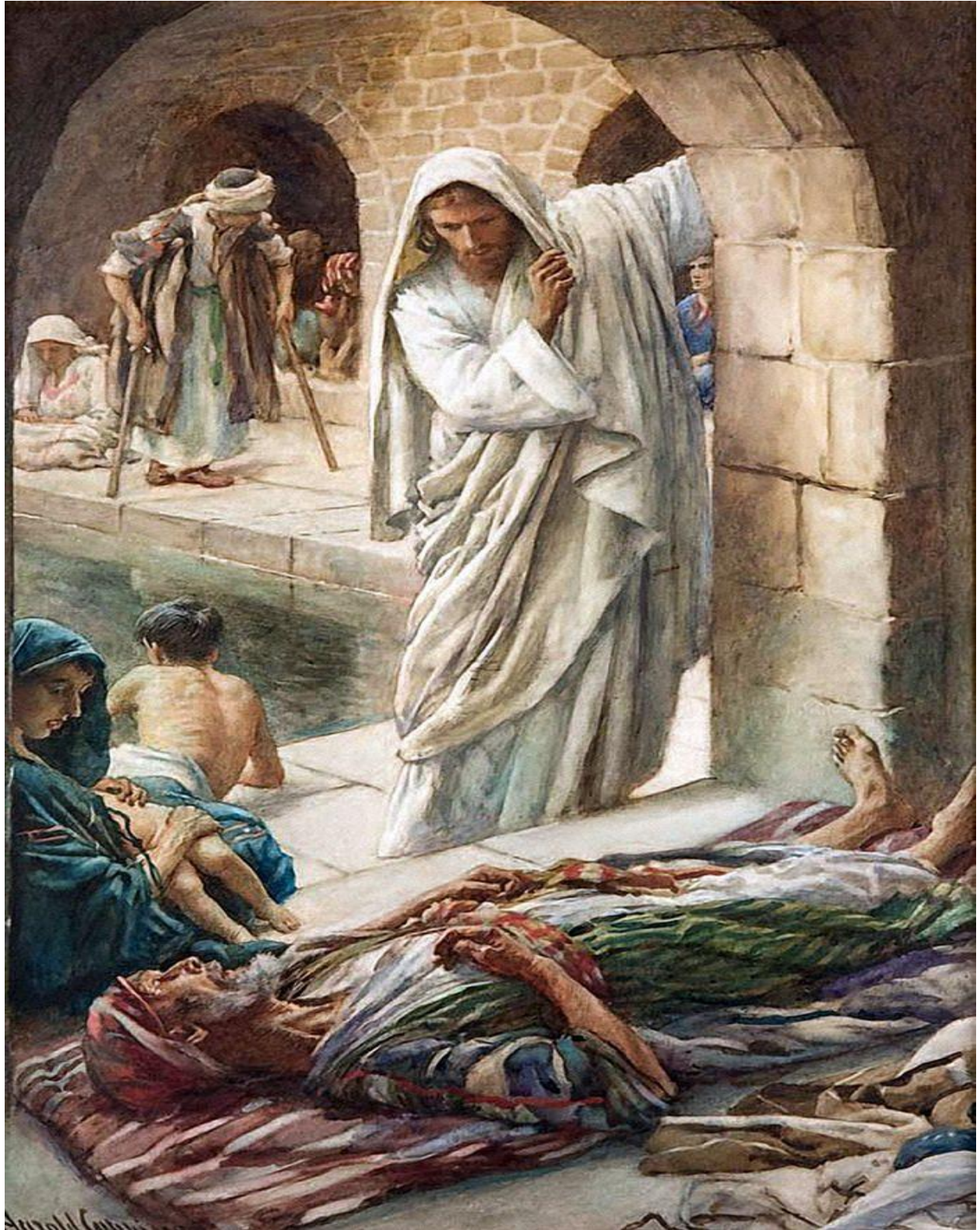
Jesus is the power at work in Holy Baptism by His Word. He is also the object of our faith in the catechesis that follows baptism.

Meditation on the Bible Story

The miracle of healing at the Pool of Bethesda teaches us that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The miracle teaches us that Jesus and His Word is the power that stirs the water of Baptism and gives it the power to save and bestow faith. Apart from Jesus and His Word, Baptism is plain water. But by Jesus' Word it is "life-giving water, rich in grace and a washing of the new birth." The helpless man is the perfect picture of a sinner. He was helpless and unable to save himself. He had to be placed into the water of the Pool of Bethesda, but no one helped him until Jesus. Jesus did not need the water because He was the power behind, in, and with the water. By His Word Jesus healed the man and he took up his bed and walked. The man could do nothing. He could only receive what Jesus gave by His Word. We must never forget that Baptism saves because baptism gives us Jesus who is the source of our salvation. Jesus' death and resurrection is the content of our baptism. By the Word of Jesus, everything that He did for us is given to us in the water of baptism. We are joined to Jesus in the water by His Word. After our baptism we continue to be catechized in the benefits and gifts we received in our baptism, so that we might walk in newness of life by faith in Jesus alone.

Prayer on the Bible Story

Lord Jesus, I give thanks to you that by Your holy Word you stirred the waters of Holy Baptism for me, giving me forgiveness of sins, rescuing me from death and the devil, and making me Your child. Teach me every day about the wonderful gifts You gave to me in my baptism, so that I remain steadfast in the true faith and do not return to a life of sin and unbelief; in Your holy name I pray. Amen.



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