

We live in difficult times. The bible scene of the ill, blind, lame, and crippled all laying around the pool of Bethesda (John 5:2-3) could easily describe any emergency room anywhere around the world. Jesus takes all of this in and his compassion naturally reaches out to the most vulnerable in the gathering. A man who had suffered for 38 years had no one to help him into the healing waters of the pool. Sadly, this is often the way of our world. The poor are marginalized and those who are stronger often overlook the helpless.

Jesus doesn't look the other way. He heals the man physically and offers him spiritual advice as well. "Look, you are well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may happen to you" (Jn 5:14). Let us be clear, Jesus is **not** drawing a connection between sin and suffering. He is merely pointing out that sin leads to more suffering than the man experienced in his 38 years as a paralytic. And ultimately, grave (mortal) sin that one steadfastly refuses to confess can lead to eternal damnation. Jesus suffered and died to set us free from sin, but we can reject his gift and choose to turn from God completely.

As if on cue, we see sin rear its ugly head almost immediately after Jesus advises him. The healed man is filled with joy, but the nitpickers find fault with Jesus healing on the sabbath and with hardened hearts they plot against Jesus. We are several weeks away from Good Friday. We know that ultimately, this grave sin on the part of those who found fault with Jesus will lead to them stirring up the crowds to yell "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Luke 23:21)

We live in difficult times. Combined, there have been 350,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus worldwide and there are nearly 15,000 deaths. While many good measures have been put in place to protect people, to test for new cases, and to care for the ill, the alarming news is that it appears the pandemic is accelerating.

Jesus is the Divine Physician. He is aided by countless doctors, nurses and health aides in cities and villages in every corner of the globe who tirelessly care for the ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One doctor who comes to mind is China's Dr Li Wenliang. He first raised the alarm about the coronavirus in the early days of the outbreak last December. Three days later police paid him a visit and told him to stop. Dr Li sought to tell the truth, but the authorities metaphorically yelled "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (Luke 23:21)

Like Jesus, Dr Li could not help but continue to tell the truth and reach out to the marginalized who were helpless against the virus. He returned to work and caught the virus from a patient despite his warning to others advising them to wear protective clothing and face masks to avoid infection. Dr Li has since died due to the coronavirus.

At the Sheep Gate in Bethesda, Jesus was the only one to reach out to the man who had suffered for 38 years. Around the globe, countless doctors, nurses, aides and good Samaritans are reaching out to those with the virus. In epicenters, those on the frontline have worked endless days treating the sick and dying while exposing themselves as well. Let us pray for their protection and affirm every ounce of compassion they offer to the sick and dying.

Let us also pray for increased understanding in our own hearts so that like Jesus, we may identify the most vulnerable and reach out to them saying with our words and our actions: "Rise, take up your mat, and walk" (John 5:8).