

Homily for the 10th Sunday of Luke: Luke 13:10-17

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Sunday, December 9, 2018

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen

Today on the 10th Sunday of Luke, we heard the parable of our Lord Jesus Christ and the woman who was bent over and could in no way raise herself.

For eighteen years, she had lived without being able to straighten herself up. This was not because of her age or because of natural causes, but because she was “possessed by a spirit of infirmity” (Lk 13:11).

But then, she met Jesus. The Lord called her to Himself and said, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity” (Lk 13:12), in other words, ‘Woman, you are healed from your sickness’. And after He said these words ‘He placed His hands on her’ (Lk 13:13), and immediately her back was made straight, and so she glorified God (Lk13:13).

This is a story about a person who had suffered for a long time and who was healed and set free by Jesus.

“But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore, come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day’” (Lk 13:14).

The leader of the synagogue was indignant about a healing taking place on the Sabbath.

If we look at Mosaic Law there was some justification for the synagogue leader’s anger: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: neither you, nor your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your cattle, nor your stranger who sojourns with you. ...” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Therefore, the leader of the synagogue was saying, ‘We must not work on the seventh day’, which for Jews begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday evening.

In fact, there is more to the Sabbath stipulation in Exodus. After where it says, “... you shall do no work ...” (Ex 20:10), it says the following: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it” (Ex 20:11).

The part where God created the world in six days is the narrative of the creation of the universe, which is recorded in Genesis.

In short, the part about the laws of the Sabbath has its foundation in the part where God created the world. God accomplished this in six days. The part about the seventh day is the next day. Therefore, the Sabbath is the day when we think about what God has done and continues to do.

But it was Jesus who showed us the true meaning of this. Saint John Chrysostom wrote the following about this; “If anyone says, “And how does the Father work, when He ceased on the seventh day from all His works?” let them learn the manner in which God works. He cares for and holds together all that has been made. Therefore, when you behold the sun rising and the moon running in her path, the lakes, and fountains, and rivers and rain, the course of nature in the seeds and in our bodies...and all the things which make up the world, then learn the ceaseless working of the Father”.

On the seventh day God rested from creating new things, but He did not rest from caring about His creations. When Jesus healed the woman on the Sabbath, He merely displayed care for one of His creations – thus showing the true meaning of the Sabbath.

In today’s Gospel reading, the Synagogue leader’s focus was too much on the Mosaic Law. It became an obstruction to his vision of the maker of the Law, God Himself.

The ruler had been so immersed in the physical aspects of the Law that he had forgotten God’s loving presence for all creation.

The anger of the synagogue ruler leads Jesus to a more direct charge of hypocrisy: the allowances made for the “loosing” of animals on the Sabbath to give them relief is a light thing, compared to the heavy matter of “loosing” a human person (and a ‘daughter of Abraham’) from the bondage of Satan (Lk 13:16). Indeed, faced with such a human need, it is necessary to heal on the Sabbath!

As a matter of fact, we can probably see that the healing and the liberation of the woman point to the kind of healing and liberation which the whole world needs.

The miraculous work of healing that Jesus performed was a manifestation of God’s mercy, compassion and love, but it was also a demonstration of His authority.

It was a demonstration of the salvation that God is willing to give to this world through Jesus Christ, and it was a sign of the age to come in eternity, pointing to God’s salvation.

The woman's former disfigurement is a symbol of the worldly person bound by Satan. She lived with a bent back for a long time. Before her healing, she symbolised the fallen world which is bound by Satan.

But she was set free by Jesus, and her body became straightened. She praised God with her upright body and spirit. Thus, Jesus came into this world in order to give healing and liberation to the sick in body (here, the woman with the infirmity) and the sick in soul (here, the ruler of the synagogue).

In the gospel, the humans around Christ, are 'us', whether they are the ones being healed or the ones crucifying or arguing with Him.

We are the ones who have received the special miracle of life and personal existence, but we are also the hypocrites who do not acknowledge God's works, His sacred action in every moment of our lives. This is what it means to live sacramentally and liturgically, to see God's work in every facet of our life. This is our spiritual task.

Jesus has already given healing and liberation to those who believe in His death and resurrection. They receive the life-giving Spirit through the hearing of faith and by enduring in this faith throughout their lives.

For this reason, St Paul gives a comparison of the Mosaic Law and the Promise, to the Galatians: "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterwards be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:23-26).

It was on the eighth day after His Birth that our Lord received the name Jesus, the Name declared by the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation. Jesus means "God saves" in Hebrew.

His Resurrection transformed the first day of the week (Sunday) into the eighth, the day of a new theandric creation, and the transfiguration of time. This is God's gift and promise to the faithful.

As Orthodox Christians, we are now free to follow in the spirit of the risen Christ, serving God's love. We are to worship God every day, not just on Saturday or Sunday (Romans 14:5).

For this reason, the Sabbath is an image of a future day of rest from evil deeds, not from good works. Jesus notes that if animals needing water were cared for on the Sabbath, certainly a woman of Israel could be delivered from Satan's bondage on the Sabbath.

Christ has given His divine life to those who are created in His image, but the only response He received was hatred. Today, after two thousand years of Christianity, what do we see? the contemporary world is quickly losing Christ, losing eternal life.

The pursuit of worldly passions, hatred, domination, wars, are what humanity focuses on now. But let us not forget the commandment Christ has given to those who decide to follow Him: 'Love your enemies'.

So, let us ask God to enlighten us and not turn us in the hostile hypocritical ruler, because he who does not live according to his belief, does not believe. Therefore, let us observe the Sabbath as Christ taught us today, and keep it holy so God can prepare and raise us up to eternal life.

Amen.