

**TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, DECEMBER 4/17, 2006**

**EPH 6:10-17**

**ST. LUKE 13:10-17**

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

**Gospel:** *And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.*

*And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.*

*And when Jesus saw her He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.*

*And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.*

*And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath Day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath Day.*

*The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away to watering?*

*And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath Day?*

*And when He had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.*

Hypocrisy is the trade of those who emulate the serpent in their twistings and twinings.<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord taught in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath as was His custom. He would go there and teach “by His very acts” to shed the light of His Way. He didn’t hide His message. Rather, by His teaching He “lit the light of his divine commandments, and put it on a lampstand, that is, His Church”. In His act of curing the woman in the midst of the synagogue ruler’s opposition due to it being the Sabbath, he provides us with an example for our ministries. We are to preach His Word regardless of opposition or disinterest:

But one who speaks often and is not heard, yet does not (on that account) give up speaking – such a man is worthy of greater honour, because he is doing the will of God; even if no one pays attention, he still carries out his duty. For wisdom that is kept hidden is no more profitable than an invisible treasure.<sup>2</sup>

To keep the light burning, spreading it to the world, requires the teaching of the Divine Word as well as “the will and effort of those who hear us. The lamp of Christ’s commandments and counsels was placed upon the Church not only for the sake of those who teach, but also for those who desire to receive the rays of its light and beauty, to be guided to a way of life that is true and good”.<sup>3</sup> Both the teacher and listener (e.g., clergy and laity) have one Master Teacher – Christ our Saviour. He taught in the synagogues to draw people and instruct them in His Way.<sup>4</sup>

The woman had a “spirit of infirmity” for eighteen years, was bent over and couldn’t straighten herself. The Fathers teach that Satan had bound her because of her sins:

Perhaps God had departed from her on account of certain sins, and as a result Satan was punishing her. For Satan is in part the cause of all the hardships which afflict our bodies, when God on high *permits* (emphasis supplied) him.<sup>5</sup>

...

Thus, the woman’s suffering was caused by the envy of the devil as the Lord said, Whom Satan hath bound these eighteen years. On account of some sins of hers, God permitted her to be oppressed by Satan for so many years. (Christ) mentioned the number of years, that we might understand that the woman’s affliction could not be cured by man, but only by God; for the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.<sup>6</sup>

Christ, then, in His Godhead, calls her to Him, and releases her from the infirmity placing His hands on her. She was immediately healed. Christ laid His hands on her to teach us that it is His holy Body, no separate person,<sup>7</sup> that “was clothed in the power and activity of God the Word”.<sup>8</sup>

Satan, being vexed by our Saviour’s deliverance of her, put evil words in the mouth of the synagogue ruler, and he hypocritically said to the people that the miracle should not have been done on the Sabbath. Satan seduced him with envy and spite. Note that Satan didn’t attack Christ directly; he addresses the assembly because he feared being rebuked by the Lord and “put to shame, as often happened to the scribes and Pharisees.”<sup>9</sup>

Christ, in answering him and calling him a hypocrite also addresses all the scribes and Pharisees because He knew they deceptively appeared to be what they, in fact, were not: “(He knew) that they said one thing while (thinking) another within themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

The Lord calls the afflicted woman “ a daughter of Abraham” on account of her faith, not because of the flesh or lineage: one who “possesses Abraham’s virtues and keeps them... has acquired Abraham’s faith”.<sup>11</sup> All who opposed the Saviour were put to shame by His words, shouldn’t the woman of Abraham be loosed from her bonds on the Sabbath – after all, even their animals were released from their stalls and led to watering on that day. Observe that the common folk rejoiced, they had benefited from Christ’s miracles and they didn’t have envy and jealousy: “many of the simple and unlearned people believed and did homage”.<sup>12</sup>

Bl. Theophylact points out that we must understand today’s Gospel and Christ’s miracles in the following way:

The miracles “refer to the *inner* (emphasis supplied) man;” whenever we stray away from Christ’s Way, and concentrate upon earthly things with no thoughts of the heavenly and divine, our souls bend over in infirmity. If we are feeble in keeping the Ten Commandments and thus weak in hope of the eighth age, “the age to come,” we can be said to have been bent over spiritually for “ten and eight years” equaling the eighteen years. I. e., if we are bent over, we are attached to what is of *this* world, disregard the commandments, and don’t look for the age to come.

Christ heals this spiritually-bent person on the Sabbath in the synagogue, who has come to the synagogue thinking of confession, resting, so-to-speak, from evil. Christ heals this person not only by His Word saying “Thou art loosed from thine infirmity” but by deed. He places His hands on us. We must accept His energy from His Divine hands to collaborate with Him in the works of virtue.<sup>13</sup>

Brethren,

Our salvation requires unconditional acceptance of our Saviour’s Word and Instruction and rejection of the ways of this world, which would tempt and lead us away from God, away from the Royal Path. Our faith allows us to straighten up!

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

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<sup>1</sup> St. Maximos the Confessor, No. 67, at p. 227, in *The Philokalia, Volume Two* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth: tr. from the Greek and ed. by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware), Faber and Faber, London, UK, first published in 1981, Paperback Edition first published in 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 529.

<sup>3</sup> *id.*

<sup>4</sup> *id.*, pp. 529-530.

<sup>5</sup> Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

<sup>7</sup> Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, taught that the two natures of Christ, Divine and Human, were in two persons, not one, and therefore not united. Were this so, Christ could not have saved us. The Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (431) condemned this heresy. See Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, fn 5 at p. 169.

<sup>8</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 532. and see Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 533.

<sup>10</sup> *id.*, p. 534.

<sup>11</sup> *id.*

<sup>12</sup> *id.*, p. 535.

<sup>13</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 170.