



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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A WOMAN HEALED ON THE SABBATH

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians [4:22-27] For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: “Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labour! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.”

EXPLANATION: Here St Paul uses an allegory (symbolic analysis) to show that “faith in Christ” has replaced the Old Covenant belief in righteousness through the Mosaic Law. He does this by reference to Genesis 17:9-23, where he invites the Galatians to remember the Old Testament Scriptures, and in particular **Abraham** who was married to **Sarah** and because she was barren, he lay with **Hagar**, his “bondwoman” (slave) and begot **Ishmael**. Later, through God’s

intervention, **Sarah** gave birth in her old age to **Isaac**. Paul wants to emphasize that the difference between the two sons did not consist only in the fact that the one's mother was a slave while the other's was a free woman. That is indeed a difference, but the true difference lies elsewhere, specifically, in the fact that one was conceived "**after the flesh**" (according to human will), the other "**through the promise**" (according to God's will). Hagar and Mt Sinai symbolize **earthly Jerusalem** and the Jews under the Law, whereas, Sarah, the freewoman symbolizes the **heavenly Jerusalem**, that is, the Church. He concludes that the Galatians are not the children of the slave woman, but of the free one. He is refuting Jewish legaliser's thesis that the Gentiles are like Ishmael, the child of the slave Hagar, and for that reason cannot inherit the promise of Abraham's children unless they become circumcised, just like Jewish Christians. **(4:22-23)** Paul compares the Galatians to Isaac as Sarah's son, on the one hand; and the Jews to Ishmael as Hagar's son, on the other. He likens Hagar and Sarah to two "**covenants**". The first was established on Mt Sinai with Moses, and the second with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, a new covenant, written upon the hearts of men instead of tablets of stone. Of the two covenants, Paul says the Old, Sinaitic one produces "slavery" (bondage to the law), the "Old Jerusalem" born of a slave woman and which refers to non-Christian Jews. The "New Jerusalem" includes Christian Jews and Gentiles who make up the Church of Christ, born "free" from the free woman, Sarah, through the promise of God. **(4:24-25)** And Paul emphasizes that the "New Jerusalem" has already come and because of its arrival and the Galatians allegiance to it, they are already Abraham's offspring and heirs of the promise made to him by God. **(4:26-27)**

GOSPEL The Reading is from St Luke [13:10-17] Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and

was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, *“Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.”* And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. 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.”* The Lord then answered him and said, *“Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound – think of it – for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?”* And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

EXPLANATION: The woman in this Gospel suffered from demoniac affliction and was **“bent over” for 18 years**. Jesus spotted her whilst He was teaching in the synagogue and immediately went to her aid. As soon as He healed her, she became upright and was **loosed from her infirmity. (13:10-13)** But the **ruler of the synagogue was filled with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath**. Satan who desired her continued affliction bound the ruler of the synagogue with spite, and through the mouth of this man reviled the miracle. Acts of help towards others on the Sabbath were considered work and were forbidden, except in life-threatening situations. However, the Lord rebukes him and puts him to shame by using the apt example that if animals needing water are cared for on the Sabbath, then is it not more important and humane to deliver this poor woman from Satan’s bondage on the Sabbath. **(13:15)** The ruler, rather than joining in the jubilation that followed Christ’s healing, instead burned with rage that Jesus had healed at all. Why? Because

of jealousy that Jesus had assumed authority and power over the ruler and all His adversaries in the synagogue, and not that the ruler cared much about the Sabbath. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) That is, only God can say He is Lord of the Sabbath (“The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”) (Mark 2:28)) Jesus is motivated by compassion. He does not deny Sabbath traditions to keep the Sabbath day holy, but teaches that it is more important to do good on the Sabbath than to maintain the strict observance of Sabbath rest. The religious leaders are motivated by zeal for the rigid performance of rabbinic tradition; for them outward performance is more important than doing good. The two perspectives are incompatible. The Lord, Who straightened out the back of this woman continues to make straight today the lives of those who are bent over by sin. There is not one of us who is not “bent over” and hurting in so many different ways. Each one of us is bent over with our own individual sorrow, our personal grief, our unique affliction and disappointment of which the world knows nothing. It may be a terminal illness upon us or one of our loved ones; or the loss of a close family member; or loss of occupation that causes economic hardship, and so on. Jesus cared for the woman and healed her with a very special care and power – just as He does for all of us who come to Him bent over by all the burdens and cares of life. All we need is faith and prayer and we will leave His presence lighter and straighter than ever before. We come to Him bent over with discouragement; we leave looking up with hope. We come to Him bent over with sin and guilt; we leave Him with sweet forgiveness. We come bent over by weakness; we leave reinforced with God’s presence with us. We come bent over by fear of death; we leave walking upright in the light and joy of Christ’s glorious Resurrection.

(13:16-18)