



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER 2019 – A WOMAN HEALED ON THE SABBATH

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians [4:1-7] I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

EXPLANATION: St Paul continued his oversight of churches in the area surrounding Ephesus while he was in prison. Letters and personal envoys were his means to encourage the Church in evangelism. The Christians had grown dispirited at the news of his imprisonment in Rome. But even in chains, he is still an ambassador for Christ and **encourages** them to **walk worthy** of their baptismal **calling**. He implores his hearers to realize what has been given to them, and to be in practice what they are in Christ. So he turns the focus of his letter from what God does for us to what we are to do in response. How you believe must affect how you live; belief must influence conduct. In baptism we were **called** to be saints, adopted sons and heirs of God so that we now dare to address the heavenly God as “Father”. **(4:1)** This life of holiness is characterized by St Paul as **humility, meekness, patience** and loving forbearance. **(4:2)** All of these virtues are needed if we are to **keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. These basic characteristics of Christians are the virtues which contribute to **unity**. Although we are many persons, we

share one new nature. This **unity** is not something we are called upon to produce ourselves, but it is the sovereign and unbreakable gift of the Holy Spirit to His Church. Unity is one of the characteristics of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Our union with Christ's Body is due to the greatness of God, not ourselves. Even the cohesiveness of this body is God's work in the Spirit. The unity that binds us one to another is the very unity that unites the Father to the Son. The fallen and unredeemed world is characterized by disunity – wars, factions, hatred and mutual separation. So there is no place for quarrelling, xenophobia and wrath. Therefore, we must **endeavour to keep** this unity by a **bond of peace**. Peace of heart within and peace of relations between us binds together in a mutual **bond**. This bond is not oppressive, but liberating. For it not only unites us one to another, but unites all to Christ. By not breaking this bond and thus shattering the peace between us, we preserve the unity of the Church and walk worthy of our calling. **(4:3)** As an encouragement to help them maintain unity and not create divisions and factions within the Church, St Paul stresses that they all belong to **one Body** and have all received **one** and the same **Spirit**. In their local communities, there is a lot of diversity, with many different kinds of personalities. The Church encompasses all races, colours, political opinions and classes. This inevitably makes for tension within the Church as all these different types strive to live in peace. St Paul calls upon them to put their differences aside because they are all part of **one Body** and thus should have the same care that one limb of the human body has for the others. That is, if one limb suffers the whole Body is in pain. And as a human body is animated by a human spirit, so it is with the Body of Christ; all in the Body have received the same **Spirit** in their baptism. Thus all have the same divine life, the same access to the Father, whatever their different social stations in the world. Thought of **one Spirit** leads St Paul to think of the age to come, that one and common **hope** to which we are all called – for the sacramental gift of the Holy Spirit is our participation in the powers of the age to come. Despite our differences, we are all called to the one Kingdom, **one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism** which are indissolubly linked. We are buried with Christ in the baptismal font and are resurrected with Him to everlasting life, to participate in the glory of the **one God and Father of us all**. We not only share membership in the same Body, the same sacramental gift of the Spirit; not only the same heavenly destination and earthly experience of the Lord in His

Church, but we also share in the same **Father** Who is **above all and through all and in you all**. That is, He is the source of life of each one and of all the world. He is sovereign **above all** the world. He is **through all**, working His purposes in all creation. He is **in all**, the inner life of all who live. Since we all share the same life-giving Father, we are all brothers. With such things held in common, how can we not strive to walk together in peace? **(4:4-6)** But while the Church is one in essence, it is diverse in gifts and function. Unity does not mean uniformity. Each member is unique before God, with gifts and roles granted by Him for the maturity and stability of the Body. Though we are all one **each one of us** was given his own **grace** (his own task and function in the Body), **measured** out to us as **Christ's Gift** according to our capacity to receive it. These spiritual gifts are distributed by the Lord as part of the riches of His ascended glory and His Resurrection bounty to His people. **(4:7)**

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 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)**