



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER 2020 – HEALING ON THE SABBATH

EPISTLE: The Reading is from Hebrews [13:17-21] Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honourably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may restore to you the sooner. Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

EXPLANATION: The Hebrew Christians were urged to follow the faith of their superiors, because it was they who preached the word of God to them. Now they are told to obey them and submit themselves to them. Priests and spiritual leaders must be respected and obeyed, a reference to “spiritual fatherhood” in the Church. These leaders have an appointment according to the will of God and are entrusted with the care of the flock. All the ranks of priesthood are responsible before God “as the ones who must give account” of

their ministry at the judgment. The priest may, in some cases, be unworthy in his own life, but if he does not depart from the faith, he is to be followed in matters of faith. The Lord Himself said, "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses's seat: all therefore whatsoever they tell you observe, do: but do not do after their works." (Matthew 23:2) St John Chrysostom writes, "Let those who rule you also hear, and not only those who are under their rule, that the subjects ought to be obedient, so also the rulers ought to be watchful and sober." It is the obedience of the subjects that causes priests to do their work with joy. It is not profitable to the disobedient subject to cause them grief, for they too are held accountable for their actions. (13:17) St Paul then asks the Jews to pray for him so that he may be able to proclaim the word of the Gospel effectively. The reason for asking their prayers and further evidence of his love for them is that he wishes to be with them. Their prayers can hasten his being restored to them because the Jews believed that he had forsaken Moses and the Law and were infuriated with him and sought to have him killed. (13:18-19) He then reminds both Jews and Christians that God has established peace between Jew and Gentile and made them one in Christ, and as a prayer that there be no divisions among Hebrew Christians when it comes to Christianity. And "through the blood of the everlasting covenant", through His suffering, death on the Cross and Resurrection, Jesus restored man to the condition he was before the fall and inaugurates a new everlasting covenant. The everlasting covenant makes us complete as we cooperate with God (synergy) in all things and progress toward sainthood. (13:20-21)

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)