10TH SUNDAY OF LUKE
December 5

THE GOSPEL READING
Luke 13:10-17
[A Woman Healed on the Sabbath]

At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.” And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.” Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

THE SERMON

During His earthly ministry, Jesus taught and preached in the synagogues. The people of God would go to the Temple in Jerusalem on the High Holy Days (what Chris-
tians call the Major Feast Days), but it was at the local synagogues in their towns where they would worship every Sabbath. In this narrative, we see a woman with an infirmity attending worship, and it was by going to the house of worship that the sick woman met Jesus. She was afflicted by a spiritual malady with a physical manifestation, a deformity in her back; we are not told what caused it, but we see two important lessons. First, she continued to put her hope in God even after many years of struggle, so she *endured suffering with grace*. Second, she was *rewarded for her perseverance and faith* when she met the Lord Jesus, who had compassion on her and healed her.

For eighteen years, the woman was bound in humiliation, social degradation, and physical pain. Nonetheless, every week she went to the place of worship to give praise to God. The fact that she was afflicted with this debilitating condition for so many years, and still worshipped at the synagogue, shows her unwavering faith and resilience. God’s love allows suffering in our lives as a means for our spiritual healing as we draw closer to Him in repentance and with the recognition of our complete dependence upon Him. This is what it means to be united to Christ’s sufferings. The woman went to the synagogue to worship God, and God the Son met her there. Notice that she does not say anything to Him or ask for anything, but Christ sees her, has compassion on her, calls her, and heals her. God the Logos speaks, and it is done: “Woman, you are freed from your infirmity;” as He laid His hands upon her, she was immediately made straight.

The laying of the hands on her shows us a pattern by which God’s grace is imparted onto us – we are persons created in body and soul, and the Lord unites us to Him through both. We sanctify and use our bodies to worship God by our crossing of ourselves, by our prostrations, etc. We receive God’s grace through visible signs of created things, such as the water in baptism, the oil in the Chrism, and the laying of hands for confession (with the epitrachelion or stole), ordination, and *artoklasia* (breaking of bread). Most notably, we receive Christ Himself through the bread and the wine, which become His Body and Blood. With this understanding, the laying of Christ’s hands healed the spiritual malady of the woman with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Saint Ambrose says, “In the infirm woman there follows as it were a figure of the Church, which having fulfilled the measure of the law and the resurrection, and now raised up on high in that eternal resting place, can no more experience the frailty of our weak inclinations.”

The woman was bent down by her malady, similar to how sin weighs us down as a result of the Fall, setting our faces also toward the ground. Jesus, however, frees us to stand up straight, so we can set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2). He restores us as humans made in His image and likeness, so we can “lift up our hearts” to the Lord (The Divine Liturgy). The woman’s response is immediate as she praises God. She is moved from weakness to strength, from the ground to the heavens, and her response is one of joy and thankfulness for the God who reaches out
to raise us up to Him. As we pray in the Divine Liturgy, “You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen away, You raised us up again. You left nothing undone until You had led us up to heaven and granted us Your Kingdom, which is to come. For all these things, we thank You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit.”

Our lives will inevitably face pain, sorrow, and affliction, whether due to our sins and failures, the sins of others, sickness, or the myriad of other obstacles arising from life in a fallen world. Despite that, like the woman, as we come to worship God with our hearts looking for His help, He frees us from the chains that bind us, from the infirmities of soul, from captivity to sin, and sometimes even from physical sickness.

We also see, in this Gospel, the contrast between this woman’s persevering faith and the hardened heart of the ruler of the synagogue. She praised God, whereas the ruler was indignant. He did not grasp the spirit of the Law and placed it above the healing of God’s creation. The ruler put the Law above love because he did not quite understand that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). God created the heavens and the earth and rested on the seventh day, which continues even now as the day of divine resting. For ancient Israel, God gave the Sabbath, meaning the seventh day (what we call Saturday), as the Day of the Lord, the day of rest and worship. When Christ came, He rested on Saturday and rose on the first day of the week, which became the fulfillment of the Lord’s Day, which comes from the Greek word Κυριακή (what we call Sunday). Although humanity had fallen away and became distant from God, Christ still in His love came to reunite humanity with Himself. That is, to renew the very meaning of the Sabbath — not merely as a day of rest, but as a day of wholeness and rejoicing in true unity with God.

In the latter portion of the Gospel reading, Christ presents a logical argument from lesser to greater: if we care for animals and untie them on the Sabbath so they can eat and drink, how much more does God care for us and frees us on the Sabbath day and every day? The purpose of the Sabbath is not to avoid all activity but to use it to celebrate God’s love of us, our love of Him, and His love for all humanity. As a result of God’s love, human beings are more important than our sins, failures, and even rules. As Saint Nektarios of Aegina says, “Love should never be sacrificed for the sake of some dogmatic difference.” Christ came to show us that the most important commandment is the commandment of love.

We see then the contrasting reactions – Jesus’ adversaries, bound by unbelief are shamed, and the ruler was unable to rejoice or praise God. While the woman who had persevered with faith rejoiced, praising Christ who healed her by the laying of the hands in the power of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is further explained in the corresponding Epistle, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). For eighteen years of suffering, the woman had kept her faith and hope, and Christ showed her that...
hope does not disappoint because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5). We ought always to persevere in seeking God, putting our hope in Him, and worshiping Him weekly in His Church, where we are healed – by the Sacraments, prayer, hymns, fellowship, and faith. It is there that we encounter Christ and receive Him, who frees us from the bondage of sin and the oppression of death.