



## TENTH SUNDAY OF LUKE

December 10

### 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, that is, in the worship places of the Jewish people outside the Temple. The people of God would go to the Temple in Jerusalem on the High Holy Days (what Christians call the Major Feast Days), but it was at the local synagogues in their towns that they would worship every Sab-



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bath. In this narrative, we see a woman attending worship, and she has an infirmity. It was there, in the house of worship, that the sick woman met Jesus.

A spiritual malady afflicted her with a physical manifestation. She had a deformity in her back. Here, we see two important lessons. First, she continues to put her hope in God even after many years of struggle, so she endures suffering with patience and grace. Second, she is rewarded for her perseverance and faith when she meets Christ, who has compassion for her and heals her.

For eighteen years, the woman struggled with social degradation and physical pain. Many at that time considered sickness, especially long-lasting conditions, to be a sign of sin and the displeasure of God. Of course, that was never true, but many with such conditions were ostracized because of that. Still, she went to the place of worship every week to praise God.

The fact that she was afflicted with this debilitating condition for so many years, and still worshiped at the synagogue, shows her unwavering faith and resilience. God's love sometimes allows suffering in our lives as a means of spiritual healing. The Christian life is one of communion with God, and this means a process of healing of our souls and our hearts. Sometimes, the spiritual medicine we need is to endure struggles in imitation of Christ. In this way, we learn to 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 the Son of God met her there. We notice that the woman does not say anything to Him or ask for anything, and yet Christ sees her. He has compassion for her, calls her, and heals her. God the Son is the Logos, the Word of God. As such, He speaks, and it is done. As He spoke the word and laid His hands upon her, she was immediately made straight.

The laying of His hands on her shows us a pattern by which God's grace is given to us. We are persons created in body and soul, and the Lord unites us to Him also in body and soul. 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 bread and wine for Holy Communion, the water in Holy Baptism and Agiasmos (the blessing of the waters), the oil in Holy Chrismation, the laying of hands for Holy Confession (with the epitrachelion or stole) and Holy Ordination, and the breaking of bread in the Artoklasia (the blessing of the five loaves).

This is why the woman's physical healing is part of her entire restoration as a human being. God cares for our bodies and souls. The woman was bent down by her sickness, just as sin weighs us down. This is the result of the Fall of Adam, which set our faces, as it were, 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. He restores us as humans made in His image and likeness, so we can "lift up our hearts" to the Lord, as we hear in 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. Her response is one of joy and thankfulness for the God who reaches out to raise us 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. Sometimes, this is a result of our failures. Sometimes, it is a result of the failures of others, sickness, or many other obstacles that are part of life in a fallen world. Despite all 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. He delivers us from the infirmities of the 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 put the Law above love because he did not understand that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. For ancient Israel, God gave the Sabbath, the seventh day (what we call Saturday), as the day of rest and worship. When Christ came, He rested on Saturday and rose on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday. He renewed 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.

Christ presents in this passage 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, His own children, and frees us on the Sabbath day and every day? Human beings are the most valuable of God's creation, as we are created in His image and likeness. Every human being is an icon of Christ.

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.

The ruler could not rejoice or praise God because he put rules over the love of people. The woman who persevered with faith rejoiced, praising Christ, who healed her by laying hands in the power of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and 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.

Christ teaches us never to give up. He encourages us always to persevere. He never forgets us. He was always close to the woman who suffered for eighteen years. He never forgot her. Her struggle brought her closer to God because of her faith. The Lord loves us and calls us to have faith and trust in Him. It is His Grace and our actions of faith and trust that pave the way toward salvation. As He freed the woman, He set us free. We are freed by seeking God, putting our hope in Him, and worshiping Him weekly in His Church. The Sacraments, prayer, hymns, fellowship, and faith are all instruments of God's grace that heal us. In Christ's Church, we encounter Christ and receive Him. He frees us from the bondage of sin and grants us eternal life.