

"The Kingdom of God Does Not Consist in Talk But in Power"
Healing of a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath
Luke 13:10-17

By Archpriest Peter Olsen

St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church, Watervliet, NY, November 28, 2021

Orthodox Christians believe that physical infirmity and the spirit are interrelated. We understand that after the Fall, the world became dominated, "held captive in bondage" to Satan. Jesus became incarnate and came into the world to liberate mankind from this bondage, which primarily is the bondage to sin. Hence, when we read in Scripture about those who are ill and the language used describes "bondage" or "captivity to Satan," we should not confuse this with demonic possession, which is something entirely different. We are still living in a fallen world, but through our Savior and His saving actions it is now possible to overcome sin, to defeat the power of Satan, to receive the Holy Spirit, to become sanctified, and to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life. Illness will always be a part of human life. Only in the next life will there no longer be "sickness, sorrow or sighing, but life everlasting" as we sing in the panikhida. Many of the saints themselves have suffered from grievous illnesses, even though through their prayers the Lord delivered others from sickness. We repent for our sins and we pray for healing, both spiritual and physical, we receive the Holy Mysteries of the Church, and we trust in the Lord and His unfathomable wisdom. This is the Christian way. Physical healing may or may not come — it is a cooperative relationship between ourselves and God. We know that God loves us as His own children, and He always knows what is best for us, even though we may not always understand the reason for our suffering or the suffering of others. Either way, our faith and trust in the Lord helps us to accept and endure everything with gratitude for the sake of our salvation.

We are informed in the ninth chapter of Luke (Luke 9:51) that the time has come for Jesus to "set His face to go to Jerusalem." Awaiting the Lord is the culmination of His ministry: the arrest, the beatings, the mockery, the Crucifixion and — the Resurrection. The "New Exodus" has begun. While "on the way" with His disciples, Jesus continues to heal people of their diseases and infirmities. The crux of the preaching of our Savior is the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, and along with it, the liberation of mankind from bondage to Satan. The last time that Luke mentions Jesus being in a synagogue was in Luke 6:6, when He also healed someone else on the Sabbath. In today's Gospel, the woman who has been bent over with infirmity for eighteen years does not ask Jesus to heal her. It is Jesus who approaches her, and in the language used in the Gospel, "releases her" from her infirmity. Her illness is a type of "captivity" or 'bondage' from which Jesus delivers her. The mission of the messiah is to release us from the captivity of Satan, and the release of this woman "whom Satan bound for eighteen years" (Luke 13:16) is enacting and demonstrating the Kingdom ministry.

The Lord faced strong opposition, and He warns His disciples that anyone who follows Him will also face the same. The scene of today's narrative, the synagogue, was the place *par excellence* where the pharisees and teachers of the Law loved to exalt themselves. The leader of the synagogue accuses Jesus of breaking the Law of keeping the Sabbath (Deut 5:12–14). Jesus is the Lord, and Jesus is the supreme authority of the correct interpretation of the Torah. Jesus does not act in opposition to the Torah or the Law but, as He says, "fulfills it" (Matt. 5:17). It is the narrow, incorrect and hypocritical interpretation of the Law by the pharisees and the scribes that Jesus opposes, not the Torah itself. Sabbath is from the Hebrew, "Shabbat," which means "rest and liberation." Jesus answers the leader of the synagogue by saying that the pharisees and scribes offer rest to oxen and donkeys. "What is greater", Jesus asks, "an ox and a donkey or a human being?" Jesus heals a woman whom He calls a "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16), giving her rest and liberation from her infirmity which she has borne for such a long time. And what better time to do this than on the Sabbath, the day of rest and

liberation? The release of this woman from the captivity to her illness is a reminder of the release of captivity from Satan that God has effected — and so Jesus' release of this woman is a sign of the new Sabbath as a result of the new Exodus that Jesus will accomplish (Luke 9:31).

St. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 4:20 that “The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.” Thus, the inauguration of the Kingdom of God involves not only verbal proclamation but things happening. In today’s world with the internet and the proliferation of so much social media, talk is easy. Whether or not our actions match our words is another matter. Today’s critics of the Church accuse Christians of mostly talk and little action. The big question is: how much does our Christian faith make a difference in our lives? Jesus does not only talk the talk but He walks the walk. He heals the blind, the paralyzed, lepers, a woman who is hemorrhaging, and today we hear about how He heals a crippled woman. He casts out the demons from those who are possessed, He feeds the hungry (for example, when He and His disciples fed the five thousand) and He shows mercy and forgiveness, such as when He saved the woman who was caught in adultery from being stoned. We are called to imitate the Lord and to not only be Christians in words but in deeds as well. We must not only talk about feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked, or visiting the sick and those in prison, but *all* Christians, clergy and laity alike, must actually *do* all these things. May the Lord inspire and help us in this sacred task to be Christians not only in words, but especially in our deeds. Amen.