

December 6, 2018

Greetings to all the Faithful of St. Andrew's,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

The Gospel reading for Sunday December 9 is Luke 13:10-17.

*Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And there was a woman who had 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 ass 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.*

In order to help facilitate our understanding of this text I will make reference to the larger context and offer some observations for consideration.

First of all, notice in Luke 13:1-5 Jesus speaks about two tragedies which had taken place: Pilate's killing of Galileans and the disaster of a tower's fall and the subsequent death of the unwary. In both cases Jesus asks if his hearers think that these victims were greater sinners than others who did not suffer such a fate. The question of whether or not these individuals who died were sinners is not addressed. But to the question of whether or not those who died were "greater" or "worse" sinners than others who did not die, Jesus answers, no! Then he tells his hearers that they should repent of their sins lest they be overtaken by judgment. Note that in verse 4 we learn that the number of those who died were *eighteen* people when the tower fell. This number shows up again when speaking of the length of time the woman in our Gospel reading has been "bound" by Satan.

Immediately after this encounter we read in verses 6-9 that Jesus tells a parable about a man who planted a fig tree and after *three* years came looking for fruit but because it had no fruit he was ready to fell the tree. The gardener responded by asking for another year of tending the tree to see if it might bear fruit the next year. If it does not bear fruit then he may cut down the tree with the ax of judgment.

It is immediately after this parable that our reading comes in verses 10-17.

In Luke 13:1-5 we learn that we should not imagine that others who suffer some tragedy or disaster are greater sinners than we are or justify ourselves as if we are righteous. Instead we should take warning that the Judgment Day will come for us as well and we should repent lest we too perish. No finger-pointing is allowed; only our repentance is appropriate.

In Luke 13:6-10 we have a parable of the coming Judgment when the owner of the fig tree (representing the people who claim God as their own) comes to see if it has been fruitful. The fruit he will be looking for is the fruit of repentance. This theme of repentance is introduced toward the beginning of Luke's Gospel where we read: "Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father;' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:8-9). In this parable the fig tree is given one more chance before the end.

Regarding Luke 13:10-17 take note of the following:

- *Satan* had bound this woman for *eighteen* years. There is a connection between this woman and the eighteen "sinners" who died when the tower fell in verse 4.
- The word "Satan" means the "the Accuser." This is the one who accuses and points the finger at sinners. He is the prosecuting attorney. This woman was bound with guilt for eighteen years.
- That she was *bent over* and could *not stand straight* underscores that she needed God's compassion not human condescension or judgment.
- The religious leader objected that Jesus cured this woman on the Sabbath, to which Jesus responds by calling out the self-righteous "hypocrites" because they show their animals more concern than a "daughter of Abraham," while falsely believing that they themselves are not *bent over* but are *standing up straight*. With noses in the air they cannot see that they should consider themselves as needing repentance rather than judging Jesus for bearing the fruit of mercy toward this woman.

Concluding thoughts: When we see a tragedy or calamity happen to others, even those we don't like, we should not judge them as sinners worthy of their lot. Instead we should take heed to ourselves and lead a life of repentance knowing that God will come in Judgment looking in our branches for the fruit of repentance. This fruit of repentance is most clearly expressed through the compassion shown to others who like ourselves are bent over and unable to stand up straight. No judgment, no accusations, only repentance of our own sins and compassion for others.

May God bless us as we live this life of repentance and by his grace be made to stand up straight and walk in his commandments of love.

Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Herman