

Christ *the Physician of our Souls and Bodies*

Man's Eyes are Made to Look Upward

December Catechetical Reflection



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EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES OF AMERICA

In the book of Exodus, the Lord says to Moses, "Before all your people I will perform wonders, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people, among whom you live, shall see the work of the Lord, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you" (Ex 34:10). This month, in the Healing of the Crippled Woman, Jesus frees a woman from bondage to a spirit of infirmity. He puts His adversaries to shame. And the crowd rejoices at the wonders God performs among them.

The healing miracle takes place in a synagogue on the sabbath. The sabbath for Jews is Saturday, the seventh day, the last day of the week. Saturday is a holy day, a day for rest from labor. The day is to be "kept holy" and offered to God. Then as today, the custom is for Jews in every town and city to gather together and hear the writings of the Law and the Prophets proclaimed. Then, the leaders of the synagogue, the rabbis, would debate the meaning of the readings and teach the people what they meant. But, here, Jesus, the Word of God dwelling among us, reveals the meaning of the Law and the Prophets by word and deed.

Afflicted with a Spirit of Infirmity

As Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, He sees a woman, bent over, crippled, and afflicted with a spirit of infirmity. For 18 years, a spirit of infirmity kept her from standing up straight and looking upward. According to the Church Fathers, the woman's illness and her healing reveal Christ's divinity and power but also shed light on our spiritual lives.

It is man's nature to stand upright. Unlike the animals, man's eyes look upward. Our upright nature and our ability to look upward and far away is a pattern repeated in the eyes of our soul or mind. The eye of our mind can look upward to see the spiritual world. Standing up, we can look toward the future and see our impending biological death and the eternal life that follows. Unlike the animals, our mind's eye can peer into the things of God.

But the crippled woman's bondage causes her to be bent over. Physically, she looks downward. Likewise, when we are bound by wicked desires, habits of sin, and the cares and anxieties of worldly things, we too are bent down and in bondage. When we are bound by this spirit of infirmity, the eyes of our soul look downward. And so, we only see value in the things of our temporary and

fleeting life. Instead of living according to wisdom, and reason, and truth, we live like an animal, even worse than an animal. Bound by the spirit of infirmity, we are bent over by base passions of greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and the rest. But God did not create us to live like animals. He created us to live as men and women gifted with reason and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Called to Healing, Called to Freedom, Called to Holiness

Notice that when Jesus sees the crippled woman, He calls her to come to Him. Before she is healed from her spirit of infirmity, she must physically come to him. Before a spiritually crippled and bent over person can be healed from the bonds of sin, he must be called by Jesus and come to Him. We will hear His call, and come to Him through prayer, reading the Scripture, the Sacraments, and the Divine Liturgy.

After Jesus calls her, He proclaims His will for the crippled woman: "You are freed from your infirmity." The same God who said, "'Let there be light,' and there was light," now says, be "freed from your infirmity" (Gn 1:3). And then, He lays His hands on her. In the hands of Jesus, we see the power of God. Still today, we see the power of God among us, in His Word and the hands of the priest. In the Divine Liturgy, the Word of God speaks through the priest: "Take, eat, this is my body...Drink of this all of you, this is my blood...for the remission of sins." In the Divine Liturgy, Jesus proclaims His will for us who suffer from the spirit of infirmity. He says to us, bent over from wicked desires, habits of sin, cares and anxieties of the world, "the servant of God receives the Holy and Precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and for eternal life, amen."

What is the woman's response? She is freed from the spirit of infirmity that had afflicted her for 18 years. And so, her response is fitting and right. She glorifies God. And what do we do when our sins are forgiven, and we are given eternal life? We fill our mouths with praise. We ask God to keep us in sanctification, that we may sing His glory, meditating on His holiness, all the day! This is the meaning of keeping the sabbath holy and resting from labor. After we gather every Sunday, the day of the Lord's resurrection, we are healed and are being healed from the spirit of infirmity. Wisdom! Let us stand upright! That our eyes may be free to look up toward God to give Him glory for the wonders He performs among us.