

ST SAVA SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
(PRO-CATHEDRAL)

A PARISH AND CHURCH COMMUNITY OF THE
METROPOLITANATE OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



СРПСКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦРКВА СВ САВА
(ПРО КАТЕДРАЛА)

ПАРОХИЈА И ЦРКВЕНА ОПШТИНА
МИТРОПОЛИЈЕ АУСТРАЛИЈСКО-НОВОЗЕЛАНДСКЕ
СРПСКЕ ПРАВОСЛАВНЕ ЦРКВЕ

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Luke 13:10-17) "THE IMPORTANCE OF MAN IN CHRIST"

On the Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Humankind was not created by chance, as we constantly reminded by modern secular theory. Neither did man create himself alone. Humankind is God's idea. God creates man and at that point instills His Divine image. That is why man is the crowning glory of all which is created, and all that exists in this world exists for humankind.

The person that recognises this Divine and Godly image and responds to the call of God to live for eternity will understand that man does not exist for himself alone, but for another, namely, one's neighbour. Closing oneself off from others and making one's sole existence as our aim in life, leads to spiritual death. Man alone cannot defeat death. And thus, along with God in our lives, man also needs another to exist, that is, one's neighbour.

Today's Gospel reading tells us about the heart of a selfish and difficult man who has no mercy for another. This point alone is terrible, but what makes it worse is that this lack of mercy is justified using God and his commandments. The woman in the story who was crippled for 18 years, being possessed, Christ heals on the Sabbath (Saturday). Attacking Christ that He has performed this miracle on the Sabbath, the day of rest, the leader of the synagogue presents a classic example of the perception of God and His Law of that day.

With these sorts of individuals, who exist even today, faith in God has been levelled to a formalistic understanding of God's Commandments, and on a legalistic approach to the relationship between God and man. With this belief, the people of yesteryear became immune to God's mercy, and thus lost the merciful approach between one another. This shows us why the Son of God was born and became man at this point in time. With Christ's birth, this legalistic approach to one's spiritual life ceased.

What spiritual gain does man have by not working on the Sabbath (day of rest), by eating the prescribed foods, and by holding onto the commandments in a ceremonial fashion, but at the same time not being interested in the other, one's neighbour, who suffers beside him? NONE!

This shows the importance and strength in Christ's response. That is why He calls the synagogue leader a hypocrite, as He knows that every one of them unties their animals to be fed and given water, but is disturbed that a woman who needed healing, is healed on the Sabbath.

Why is this important to us? As Christians, we are aware that man is invited to seek help from God to save oneself from destruction and death, but we sometimes forget that we are also invited to partake in the fulfillment of God's plan for humankind. The Birth of God as man is the primary and essential new teaching for man – namely, Christian anthropology. And on this point, St John Damaskin states that Christ „is the only truly new under the sun“.

The essence of humankind is not only that we are rational beings. Even as rational beings that are civilised, we can still harbour feelings of hatred, anger, lack of love and compassion towards our neighbours, along with other destructive feelings. The essence of humankind can only be found in the fact that God became man, namely in Christ and through Christ. Therefore, how we see and feel Christ, depends on how we see and feel for others. That is why man before the Birth of Christ doesn't have the same value as man after the Birth of Christ.

With the Birth of God as man, God takes on human nature, and gives man significance. By calling the crippled woman a „daughter of Abraham“, Christ shows us that every single person without prejudice is important to God, because He is the God „that wishes that all persons are saved and come to the knowledge of truth“ (1 Timothy 2:4).

That is why the commandment of love towards God cannot be fulfilled without the commandment to love one's neighbour, because at that point we tarnish our love towards God. The synagogue leader from this Gospel message is a prime example. If we are genuine Christians, who follow Christ, we are obliged to help our neighbour and loved ones in need, taking on their hardships as our own. By doing so, we accept that we are „tools“ in God's hands through whom God offers help to those who require it.

The fallen and self-centred man who helps his neighbour in his own name, not in God's, hurls to spiritual emptiness and pride. Such assistance isn't for spiritual fulfillment neither to the one being helped, nor to the helper. Every work we do, every good deed, simply every action we undertake, **cannot be in our name, but only and exclusively in God's holy name.** Only thus will our spiritual life have true meaning and lead us to eternity, both us as helpers and those in need.

In this way, we will feel the delight felt by those that rejoiced and delighted in this Gospel story, witnessing the great deeds that Christ performed.