



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel finds Christ teaching the people in a synagogue on the Sabbath. Luke tells us that as Christ looked upon the faithful, He saw a woman who had a severe disability, and had been unable to straighten her back for 18 years. Christ knew her pain, as He knew her faith, and so He said, "*Woman, you are free from your infirmity*", and when He laid hands on her, she was healed (*Luke 13:12*).

The ruler of the synagogue, however, did not marvel or rejoice at this miracle. Instead, he became angry that Christ had violated the Law, reminding the congregation that, "*There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day*" (*Luke 13:14*). Our Lord, as the Incarnate Word of God was angered by the hardness of their hearts. "*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?*" (*Luke 13:15-16*)

Of course, His enemies were put to shame, but our Lord did not speak out to exalt Himself. When we read of our Lord finding Himself in conflict with the religious authorities, it is always because He reminded them that the Law was created to help mankind's weaknesses. Moses gave the Law to bring people closer to God, but some became less focused on the Spirit of the Law—justice, mercy, and compassion—and focused more on upholding the Letter; therefore, they believed that it would be better to leave this infirm woman in pain, than to violate the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy. Christ, as both Man and God understands that the holiness of the Sabbath day is magnified, not made small, when we serve others.

There is an interesting detail in this passage, when our Lord asks them, "*Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger?*" When He shows that the people seem to value their animals more than their neighbor, his choice of animals, may remind us of His Nativity, which we will soon celebrate. However, Christ's birth in the manger is not just a sign of our Lord's condescension to take on flesh in poverty, but it is also a fulfillment of one of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies: "*The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand*" (*Isaiah 1:3*). He was born into a manger because no room could be found for Him, but He also lived, died, and rose again to serve those who were cast aside by society.

My brothers and sisters, as we prepare to stand before the humble manger, let us always remember that our Lord's commandments are not given to restrict, but to save. Let us also remember that if we mean to truly live out the will of our Creator, we must love others, and seek to help them, no matter the circumstances.

**+ALEXIOS**

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