

Homily on Sunday 19th January 2025. CW Eucharist with prayer for healing, laying-on of hands and anointing.

Text: Luke 13: 10-17

Title: The healing by word and action.

As a father, husband or as son in law, I have different concerns for those who I love the most, for my friends and colleagues, but also for the fragile state of the world today, facing widespread violence, increasing poverty, and growing climate change. I do care for any single member of this congregation, and particularly for those who are physically or mentally sick or simply lonely. I really would like to have more time outside my demanding professional responsibilities, to be closer and help more Daphne and Glen in pastoral care. Last December, I had a “glimpse” of the possible future during my church placement in Norwich, where I was full time devoted to help the Priest and the congregation.

The passage of this evening speaks to us about the importance of human dignity and ways to humbly help to heal, following Jesus’ commandment to love one another. The Gospel’s reading is about Jesus’ teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath. As you know, the Sabbath is a day devoted to rest since the most ancient times of Hebrew tradition, and Jewish custom seems to say that there is nothing to be done on that day.

According to St. Luke, Jesus heals a woman who had been crippled with some kind of spinal injury for eighteen years. In fact, the woman is severely bent over, and she is not able to stand completely erect, which indicates the seriousness of her disease.

Jesus starts the healing upon seeing with compassion the woman’s sad condition, and acts by calling to her and **declaring that she is free** from her ailment. It shows Jesus’ authority, his word has the power to reverse her condition, but he **backs up his words with action**. Jesus **lays his hands on the woman** and immediately she straightens up and responds by offering praise to God. The woman, by her praise, recognizes the connection between Jesus and the exercise of God’s power.

The leader of the synagogue does not talk to Jesus directly, instead he addresses those who have observed the Sabbath healing saying, healing can be done on any day other than the Sabbath, which is based on the view that healing is precisely labour. In a few words, he is saying that the Sabbath has been violated by Jesus’ labour.

Confronting that legalist affirmation made by the leader, Jesus replies in plural (hypocrites), highlighting that the leader is not alone in his thinking about the Sabbath. Jesus contrasts the leader's indignation at the woman's being healed on the Sabbath with the Jewish readiness to untie cattle, freed them at the manger, and lead them to water on the Sabbath.

The leaders were condemned by their own practice, given that they showed compassion for animals, but not to humans on a sacred day. Jesus explains that one should feel the same moral necessity to aid this ailing daughter of Abraham on the Sabbath. It is quite simple, what is true of animals is even more true of people.

The Gospels describe a range of miracles, and although there is a distinction between Jesus' healings and some of these miracles, they have something in common: **Jesus meets acute human need, largely through the power of his word**. Jesus points out how this attitude denies the rational approach which they exercise in relation to the Sabbath. It also shows that sometimes, very good religious principles may be turned into allies of the power of evil. We can reflect that in our daily life we also can fall into the trap to justify our own failure to show compassion for some people because they are different.

Perhaps we do not have the healing powers of the Son of God, but historically, the Church has always offered a rich and diverse range of ministries of healing. This has been done from the ancient tradition of care and hospitality undertaken by monastic communities centuries ago, to more recent professional developments in fields such as 'hospital chaplaincy'. In fact, for centuries Christians have ministered to the sick through **prayer and sacrament, counsel, and practical care**, bringing the presence of caring love into the lives of suffering people. The Church has been certainly providing pastoral care to those in need, through the power of **its words and its actions**.

One question to be made today is, who can support pastoral care under the guidance of the priest? Or which are the minimum necessary skills for performing that responsibility?

Well, if I need to mention three requirements I would say: first of all, it is necessary to be **utterly human** in order to walk with others for the deep human dignity of children of God; second, to have a clear disposition of **intellectual and spiritual humility**; and third, the availability of "**being there**" for others, the basic possibility to be present. Pastoral care means good listening, wise counsel, and respectful attention to balance and boundaries. Following the example of our Saviour, it will require silence and kind words, quietness, and

loving actions, but most importantly, at the end, we ALL have the capacity to care for others and make a difference with God's help!

I think that every time that we come to worship, particularly when we come into the presence of the Lord in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and especially when we are in this Holy Communion for Healing and Reconciliation, in prayerful support for each other, we are trying to follow Jesus in his word and action.

In this Eucharist with prayers for healing and the laying-on of hands and anointing, we shall have the ancient sign of restoration and renewal, of healing and reconciliation, the anointing of each person with the sign of the cross marked in this blessed holy oil.

Finally, I would like to invite you to think about the importance of human dignity and ways to humbly help to heal others with prayers and actions, by the Grace of God, and following Jesus' commandment to love one another.

Amen.