

Miracles of Christ

Menes Abdul Noor

CALL OF HOPE • STUTTGART • GERMANY

Translated from the Arabic by Henrick Rasmussen

All Rights Reserved

Order Number: SPB 4320 ENG

First published in Arabic 1992, first English edition 1995

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James or the
New International version of the Bible

CALL OF HOPE • P.O. BOX 100827 • D-70007 STUTTGART, GERMANY

Internet: <http://www.call-of-hope.com>

E-mail: info@call-of-hope.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE FIRST MIRACLE	
TURNING WATER INTO WINE	6
THE SECOND MIRACLE	
HEALING THE NOBLEMAN'S SON	16
THE THIRD MIRACLE	
GREAT CATCH OF FISH	26
THE FOURTH MIRACLE	
HEALING PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW	35
THE FIFTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE LEPER	45
THE SIXTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE PARALYTIC	54
THE SEVENTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE SICK MAN AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA	65
THE EIGHTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE MAN WITH A WITHERED HAND	77
THE NINTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE CENTURION'S SERVANT	87
THE TENTH MIRACLE	
RAISING THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN	97
THE ELEVENTH MIRACLE	
CALMING THE STORM	107

THE TWELFTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE MAN POSSESSED BY THE DEMON CALLED "LEGION"	114
THE THIRTEENTH MIRACLE	
RAISING JAIRUS' DAUGHTER	124
THE FOURTEENTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE WOMAN FROM A FLOW OF BLOOD	133
THE FIFTEENTH MIRACLE	
HEALING TWO BLIND MEN	143
THE SIXTEENTH MIRACLE	
FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND	151
THE SEVENTEENTH MIRACLE	
WALKING ON THE WATER	160
THE EIGHTEENTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE PHOENICIAN WOMAN'S DAUGHTER	171
THE NINETEENTH MIRACLE	
THE GRADUAL HEALING OF A BLIND MAN	181
THE TWENTIETH MIRACLE	
THE COIN FOUND IN THE MOUTH OF A FISH	189
THE TWENTY-FIRST MIRACLE	
THE ONE WHO GAVE THANKS	198
THE TWENTY-SECOND MIRACLE	
HEALING THE MAN BORN BLIND	207
THE TWENTY-THIRD MIRACLE	
RAISING LAZARUS	218
THE TWENTY-FOURTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE WOMAN BENT OVER	230

THE TWENTY-FIFTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE BLIND BARTIMAEUS	239
THE TWENTY-SIXTH MIRACLE	
CURSING THE FIG TREE	248
THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MIRACLE	
HEALING THE EAR OF MALCHUS	257
THE TWENTY-EIGHTH MIRACLE	
THE CATCH OF 153 FISH	266

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ is a miracle worker. He did, and still does work miracles. He has performed miracles among us. He is alive, still performing His miracles every day because His love for mankind does not change, and the needs of mankind never end. True, Jesus is not among us in the flesh, but He is in our midst in His Spirit, in His church, in the hearts of those who follow Him and in the whole world. He said, ``All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth... I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18,20). Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

The miracles of Christ reveal His power and His love. At the beginning people are dazzled with power. But the miracles of Jesus always dazzle us, because the power of Jesus works in the service of His love. Our wonder at Jesus continues to deepen and increase, so we shout for joy,

Oh, happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away,
He teaches me to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing every day.
Oh, happy day, happy day
When Jesus washed my sins away!

I have read the miracles of Jesus many times. I meditated on them as true historical incidents. I also saw them as contemporary occurrences in my life and the lives of those whom I know and serve. Now I am sharing the good news of the wonderful love of Jesus with the readers in the east and the west.

Meditating on the miracles of Jesus, mentioned in the four gospels, I have concentrated on:

1. The person in need of the miracle. He presents our need to the

Lord. A miracle is something beyond us. This is why God performs it for us.

2. Those who saw the miracle: believers and non-believers, those who were happy for the miracle and those who opposed it. This shows us the power of God reaching to the needy ones who waited upon Him, and filling their lives with joy. But the miracles of Christ are like the light that disturbs the sick eye. It disturbed the non-believers and provoked them to anger.

3. Then we will meditate upon the person of Jesus who performed the wonders. Many times we behave like children who grab the gift and forget about the giver. As we meditate upon Christ we want to thank Him, live closer to Him and follow Him in love.

This is the wish and prayer of the author for himself and for his readers.

Menes Abdul Noor,

Cairo, February 1994

THE FIRST MIRACLE

TURNING WATER INTO WINE

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ``They have no wine." ⁴``Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?" Jesus replied. ``My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, ``Whatever He says to you, do it." ⁶ Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of the purification of the Jews, twenty to thirty gallons apiece. ⁷ Jesus said to them, ``Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He told them, ``Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. ⁹When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made to wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. ¹⁰And he said to him, ``Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have saved the good wine until now." ¹¹ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him (John 2:1-11).

This miracle took place in a wedding party at the village of Cana which is about ten kilometres away from Nazareth. Both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. It is most probable that the people of the wedding were blood relatives of Jesus. When the wine that was offered to the guests was consumed, the people of the wedding were faced with serious trouble. For if they did not offer wine to the guests, whom they had invited, there would be a scandal. Mary the mother of Jesus came to Him, saying, ``They have no wine." Thereupon, He told the servants to fill up the

waterpots, and turned the water that was in them into wine, meeting the needs of the hosts. And this is how He always is.

This first miracle that Jesus performed was at a simple party of some poor folk. The narrative starts off saying, ``On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee ...'', which means that two important days preceded this third day. The first of these days was mentioned in John 1:35 when John and Andrew found Jesus and followed Him because of John the Baptist's witness to Him. Then Andrew brought along his brother Peter to Christ. As regarding the second day, it was mentioned in John 1:43 when Christ found Philip, who in turn found Nathanael. And on the third day Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding at Cana of Galilee. It follows that these five persons accompanied Jesus to the wedding banquet, enjoying in their hearts the joy of salvation. Jesus shares our joys with us and does not separate between spiritual joys, which are brought about through receiving Him as Saviour, and social joys, such as weddings. He shares in the joys of the families.

Then they ran out of wine! Some expositors have remarked that Jesus and His five disciples' going to the wedding added to the number of the guests, which caused them to run out of wine, and they therefore appealed to Him! This interpretation is not acceptable on the grounds that Jesus and His disciples had been invited to the wedding. It is most probable that the people of the wedding were poor, and had the hope that the stock they had was enough for the guests. But, as it was, the guests consumed more than what the people of the wedding had planned!

I. THE PEOPLE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The bride and the bridegroom:

The wedding party is the happiest time for the wedded couple. The Jews used to call the bridegroom ``the king'', and the bride they called ``the queen''. Any wish they asked was instantly

granted them. It is most probable that no one had told the bridegroom that the wine was finished, because they did not want to spoil the joy of getting married. He was in need, yet he did not know it. How often are we in need, yet do not feel that we are! But we have to feel thirsty before asking for the water of life, and hungry before asking for the living bread. We have got to feel our sinfulness before we turn to God for forgiveness and salvation. How dangerous is the situation of him who is in need but does not know it! Sometimes the ones nearest to us prevent us from hearing the news that we are in need because they love us. Yet if they really loved us, with a reasonable love, they would tell us immediately about what we need so that we may ask it from the Lord.

2. The guests of the wedded couple:

They felt the need and appealed to Mary. So Mary, His mother, said to Him, ``They have no wine." She presented the request as a statement and not as a command. This is the same as what two other beloved sisters did with Christ, namely Mary and Martha, when their brother Lazarus was sick. They sent Him a message (John 11:3). How beautiful it is to know that Christ is aware of what we need even before we ask, and that we can present our needs to Him as a statement: ``Lord, we have no salvation of our own. We have no money. Our children are having exams. Lord, my son is sick. My relative is in trouble." The bridegroom's folk knew how well they had to cater for the guests. Wine was indispensable! The Rabbis used to say, ``getting drunk with wine is a shame, but there is no wedding without drinking wine. We drink, but do not get drunk."

II. THE WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. The Virgin Mary:

Seeing that things went wrong, she looked for Jesus. She teaches us to seek Christ, for He is our true refuge and primary help.

Before we seek a physician, let us seek Him. Before seeking a lawyer, let us seek Him. Before we ask for people's advice, let us consult the great Counsellor, ``for His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor" (Isaiah 9:6), since He is the mighty God. He is the Prince of peace who gives security to our hearts, and then we can seek people for help, whom He assigns and helps to help us.

The Virgin knew who Jesus was, and she marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him and kept them in her heart thinking of them (Luke 2:32,51). And when she presented to Him the request of the people of the wedding, He answered her, ``Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." It seems to us as though she got no direct answer from Him, but she understood what He meant, and in perfect faith she said to the servants, ``Whatever He says to you, do it."

So what did Jesus mean by saying to His mother, ``Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?" This Aramaic expression depends to a great extent on the tone of the speaker. If the speaker says it sharply, then he is reprimanding the one he addresses. But if he says it softly, then he means to say, ``Do not worry; you do not know what I will do. But leave the matter in my hands, and I will tackle it in my own way. I will see to it." And it goes without saying that Christ could not have answered his holy mother sharply, but rather in all love and tenderness, as if He was saying to her, ``Mother, no need for you to worry about it; give it up to Me, depend on Me. I have My own way of bringing problems to an end. Do not think about it any more."

As to His saying to her ``Woman ...", it might seem to us dishonourable. Yet the fact is otherwise, for it is a word of respect and appreciation. Jesus addressed her while He was on the cross,

saying, ``Woman ..." (John 19:26) when He was entrusting her to John the beloved. It was a word of respect, not disrespect.

Then He said to her, ``My hour has not yet come." This hour of His is the hour of manifesting his glory, which was to ultimately lead to his crucifixion. It was as if He was saying to her, ``The hour for revealing Myself to the people has not yet come; that revelation which is to lead Me to the cross." For the glorification of the Son of Man is His crucifixion. This major event was brought about by His teachings and miracles, which provoked the elders of the Jews to anger so that they decided to crucify Him (John 12:23,24).

The Virgin Mary did not know the solution to the problem, but she commanded the servants, ``Whatever He says to you, do it." This kind of faith holds a great lesson for us, for whatever commands and instructions Christ gives you are the best for you, even if you do not find them logical.

2. The disciples:

``He manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). The five disciples had believed in Him on the two previous days. Why then does it say that He manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him? The answer: Faith does not stop at a certain degree; it increases and grows stronger and deeper every day. Those five believed in Him and followed Him, and left everything to go after Him, but they need their faith to be strengthened. ``Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). One godly man said, ``A believer is like a man riding a bicycle. The bicycle does not stop or go back, but has to go forward all the time." Believers are supposed to be like this bicycle rider, going always forward to Christ.

3. The servants:

``Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing 20 or 30 gallons

apiece." These waterpots were made of stone and were filled with water so that they could wash themselves whenever they came in from outside. There were two sorts of washing: washing the feet whenever they come in from the dust of the road, and washing the hands for the ritual purification. Without this ritual purification they could neither eat nor pray. Due to the big number of the guests, all the water was used up. Each stone pot held 30 gallons.

Christ commanded the servants to fill the waterpots to the brim. We notice that these pots were waterpots, not wine pots. So no one can say that there was any wine left over from before, or even that they smelt wine. He told them to fill them up to the brim so that no one could say that He added some wine to them. They were so big that no one could put wine into them without being seen. The evidence is clear before all the people: empty pots filled by the servants, not the disciples.

The servants were the first to obey the command of the Virgin Mary, and the first to behold the miracle performed.

4. The guests:

Christ ordered the servants to offer the wine to the guests; and the master of the feast (the honorary guest) tasted the wine first and expressed his satisfaction.

Today we refuse wine because we fear that the one who drinks it cannot control it, and rather it controls him, as the Japanese proverb says, ``People drink the cup (of wine) and the cup drinks the cup, and the cup drinks the people!" Wine starts out as your servant, and ends up turning you into its slave. We fear for our little children, that if they see us drinking they, too, will drink to excess and lose control over themselves. We are afraid of drinking wine for this may cause a stumbling block for those around us.

5. The master of the feast:

When the master of the feast tasted the wine, he said, ``Every

man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior, but you have kept the good wine until now." This is a wonderful statement said by the master of the feast, but he was not aware of its depth in relation to what Christ does in the lives of people. With Christ, the best always comes at the end. In your study through the word of God, the more you study, the deeper you get. You start out by eating of the word and finding it "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10). "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16).

This also happens when you obey Him; the more you obey Him, the more blessing you discover in your life. Obeying Him may at first be hard, but the blessings of obedience show you that the best comes at the end.

You may not see His disciplining you as a joyful thing, but grievous; nevertheless He gives those who have been trained by it the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). The end of chastisement is always the best. The end part with Christ is always better: "Every new morning is better than yesterday for me."

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ joined in a wedding party in which He performed His first miracle to say to us, "Marriage is honourable among all" (Hebrews 13:4):

Some people spread misery round about them, presenting the message of Christ as though it is only a message of grief over sin. Christ, however, presents to us the gladdening gospel of the kingdom. When He was born, the angel announced: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). The gospel of Christ means the joyous news, for our faith life is a life of joy. When someone sees joy over our faces, he will want to share our joy with us.

In one of the church's conferences in Bet Al-Salaam, Agami, Alexandria, Egypt, an expert psychologist, who worked in a hospital for psychosomatic mental disease, said, ``If we bring our patients to Bet Al-Salaam, Agami, I assure you they will get healed seeing your joy while eating, with happiness and simplicity of heart, and playing and praying together happily, and listening to the word of the Lord with joy."

Christ sanctified the joys of life by being present in their midst, and returned the joy that the hard circumstances of life have spoilt. Christ blessed every-day life; so that even the daily chores of life have become holy and gladdening. Isn't it He who changed the Law into the covenant of grace? ``For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). He turned that which is good (the Law) into that which is better (grace).

This is the great Christ who began His miracles at a wedding party; blessing, providing and meeting needs.

2. Christ performed the miracle in a poor house in Cana: He shared with ordinary people, the sinners, and used normal things like waterpots and water.

He asked for the cooperation of the servants with Him to fill up the pots and give the guests to drink.

This is Christ who came to us being born in a manger, so that we all may find the way that leads to Him both the poor and the rich, the sinners and the godly. He has everything that anyone would need.

But the normal turns in Christ's hands into the miraculous! If you surrender your life to Him, He will perform a miracle in and through your life. Try to offer all of yourself to Him, and you will see the miracles happening to you day in and day out.

3. Christ changes that which is good into that which is better:

The master of the feast bore witness that the last was better. This is what Christ does to you when you offer your life to Him. Your end will be better than your beginning.

He turned the symbols of the Old Testament into the truths of the New Testament. He turned the sacrifices of the Old Testament, when He came to us as the Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world, into one sacrifice: the sacrifice of Himself, providing for us thereby an eternal redemption.

He turned the water baptism with which John the Baptist baptised into the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism of John was for repentance. Repentance is good, but Christ turned it into the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to control the lives of the believers.

I hope that He turns His word, which we always hear, into that which is better: namely into the cup of salvation, so that we may lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord (Psalm 116:13).

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank You that Christ shares our joys with us, as He also feels our needs and stands by us in all the circumstances of our lives, responding to our prayers, and holding us up in the time of want.

Teach us to run to Him without hesitation, and offer our lives to Him in all confidence, fulfilling the sweet commandment that says, "Do it." In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What had happened on the first important day that preceded this miracle?

2. What had happened on the second important day that preceded turning the water into wine?
3. What did Christ mean by saying to His mother, ``Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?"
4. What do you learn from Mary's statement: ``Whatever He says to you, do it"?
5. Why did Christ join in the wedding party?
6. How can the last with Christ be better than the first?
7. Identify two things that Christ turned into that which was better.

THE SECOND MIRACLE

HEALING THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

⁴⁶ Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. ⁴⁸ "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." ⁴⁹ The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." ⁵³ Then the father realised that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. ⁵⁴ This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judaea to Galilee (John 4:46-54).

This is the second miracle that Jesus performed. The first one (turning water into wine) was performed in a wedding party, while the second under the shadow of an impending death and funeral. The first one was performed for the sake of some poor folk, while the second for a nobleman.

The poor man has got his problems, and the rich man too. The higher the tree towers, the more it feels the vehemence of the storms. There is still the pestilence that walks in darkness, and the destruction that lays waste at noonday (Psalm 91:6)!

This is a miracle of healing a sick son, whose father travelled from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 30 kilometres that would have required a whole day of travelling at the time. The father must

have travelled for a whole day then, in order to meet the Performer of the miracle.

We do not know who this nobleman was. Maybe he was Chuza, Herod's steward (Luke 8:3), or maybe he was Manaen who had been brought up with Herod (Acts 13:1). But above all, he was a father who loved his son, and was at the point of losing him for ever!

As we meditate on this miracle let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The one who was truly in need was the sick son:

a. He was sick and at the point of death, unable to move. He was in the charge of his father. Although he had no idea of what was going on around him, yet his father did what should have been done. Are you a son who casts himself on his heavenly Father with assurance, knowing that He is in charge of all your affairs and that He holds all authority over your life? Do you know that your Father is perfect love? Do you know that His love, authority, and everything He has are at your service?

God often gives us a shock that paralyses us and renders us unable to move, so that we must surrender all our affairs to Him. Many times we think we are capable and independent of Him, and that we can do a lot of things without having to turn to Him. So He gives us a shock because He loves us, and in order to cause us to fly to Him for refuge, and seek His shelter.

b. The sick son, however, teaches us another lesson. Many times we do not feel our needs for the severity of our sickness. The son was so sick that he did not feel the need for a physician. But our good Father draws our attention to our spiritual sickness, our

weakness and need for a Saviour, so that we may cry out with the tax collector, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

2. The second person in need of the miracle was the nobleman:

The Gospel does not mention the mother. But she, too, needed Christ to heal her son, just as the father did. The mother remained behind, beside the sick bed, while the father went seeking Christ's help. The man and his wife are one (Matthew 19:5). Since they are one, the Gospel considered it sufficient to mention only the father who went to implore Christ and lay his request before Him.

Both father and mother were stricken with grief. But unless this distress came upon them, they would not have thought of going to Christ. God let them get into such a predicament in order to compel them to turn to the Nazarene Carpenter who had a reputation for being a performer of miracles. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). God is a loving and gracious father who never afflicts us just for the sake of affliction, but to teach us and bring us closer to Him.

a. The nobleman swallowed his pride and travelled from Capernaum the capital to a small village to meet Christ and ask Him to heal his son. He did not care what the people might say, because the distress of his soul made him humble himself before Christ.

b. He accepted Christ's reproach in humility, and, therefore, passed the test of faith. He said to Christ, "Please, come down and heal my sick son, because he is at the point of death." But Christ gave him a seemingly harsh answer: "Unless you people see signs and wonders!" Christ reproached the man, and he accepted it in humility. Christ was aware of the man's faith, so He gave the test that his faith could pass! "God is faithful, who will

not allow you to be tempted (tested and examined) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape..." (1 Corinthians 10:13).

c. The father came to Christ for his son's sake, and sought healing for him. How much fathers do for their children's sake! These are also children who do good to their parents. There may be a son who leads his father to Christ. Do we care for the members of our families spiritually? Do we think about the elders in our families, pray and tell Christ about them, as the father told Christ about his son?

There are old parents in our families. I wish we would care for them, as our parents cared and prayed for us until we came to know Christ the Saviour! Let us think about our uncles, aunts and those who are older than us and present them to Christ.

d. The nobleman placed his whole confidence in Christ in spite of the pressure of time: "Please, come down with me before my son dies." And when Christ said to him, "Your son lives," he believed the word and returned to his home not seeing anything yet. He placed his trust in a spoken word, and realised that his son got healed. He returned home without seeing anything that would soothe his heart. But, isn't this faith? It is having confidence in things we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). It was said about Abraham, "who, contrary to hope, in hope believed" (Romans 4:18), and got what he hoped for. The nobleman did not say, "Maybe what Christ said was true." But he rather said, "Certainly Christ fulfilled His promise and was as good as His word." We need this sort of faith that makes us put our complete trust in Christ as sinners who need forgiveness, and realise that the atonement of His Cross is sufficient for cleansing us.

Every faith has a starting point, and every faith grows and increases. It all starts by hearing, which makes us ask. Faith started in the nobleman's heart when it was said to him, "Christ

can heal your son; He has performed a miracle in Cana, turning water into wine. The Messiah has come!"

Here, his faith increased. He went to Christ, covering a distance of 30 kilometres that took him a whole day, in order to implore Christ for his son's healing. The increase of faith was manifested when he believed Christ as He said, ``Your son lives," and acted on this word. His faith was perfected in action and experience when he got what Christ gave him. He understood that in the hour when Jesus said, ``Your son lives," his son was healed. His faith was also perfected when he and his whole household believed on the Lord. The perfection of faith is to open your heart to Christ to change your life, so that you can lead others to Christ the Saviour. Many of us enjoy God's care and know and love God who takes care of us. This is, however, the way a beggar treats a benefactor. But we want to have the relationship of a son with his father. ``But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Thus we are transported from the position of a slave begging from a benefactor to the privileged status of a son asking his father.

Our faith must feed on the promises of God and take hold of them. This way faith grows and increases, because not a single word of any good thing that the Lord has spoken to us shall fail (Joshua 21:45).

Faith must always act in the absence of feelings. It was not the father's feelings that made him return to Capernaum, but his faith in the fact that the word of Christ must come true, that His promise must be fulfilled and that His command must come to pass. He said to him, ``Your son lives."

Does your faith in Christ encourage you to talk to Him as the nobleman did about his son? Does it rest assured? When He says to you, ``Your son lives," do you believe in the word He spoke and

act on it? Your faith in Christ gives you and your family a blessing, for true faith blesses the believer and his family.

II. THE WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. Those who heard the entreaty of the nobleman:

When the nobleman entreated Jesus to heal his son, they heard what He had to say. Christ said to them, ``Unless you people see signs and wonders!" Perhaps Christ addressed this sentence to those standing around Him because they wanted to see the miracle that Christ was going to perform. They sought to see with their own eyes before they would believe, while Christ wants the strong faith that believes even before it sees, as He said to Thomas, ``Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Christ said this word in order to treat a case in Cana of Galilee. He wanted them to believe in Him not on the grounds of being the son of a carpenter, or on the grounds that all His brothers were there among them, but because He is the One who came from heaven. This was the belief of the repentant criminal who said, ``Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). He saw the One hanging on the cross as Lord of a kingdom, although the human eye would see Him only as a fellow criminal! The repentant criminal saw the unseen! Therefore, Christ rewarded him with faith that leads to eternal life.

2. The nobleman's men:

They met the returning father with the good news, the hour and circumstances of which they knew. They saw and carried the report to their master. They did not originate the good news; they only carried it. ``Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The seventh hour is one p.m. according to our way of keeping time, which is seven hours after sunrise according to the Jewish

way of keeping time. So the father realised that it was the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ``Your son lives."

We believers often watch God's work among us, and see the miracles of change in people's lives. We see miracles of healing that more than satisfy people's expectation, and a great divine providence that does wondrous works that are above our imagination. ``To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Ephesians 3:20).

God performs miracles in our lives. We did not imagine these miracles. We merely see them and enjoy their blessings. So let us go out and tell what the Lord has done and how He showed mercy to us!

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. W

Christ had compassion for the father who presented the request, and for the sick son lying far away in Capernaum. The father's faith was weak. We do not blame him, though, for if we were in his shoes, maybe we would say something worse than what he said! It is weak and simple faith to say, ``Come down and heal my son, for he was at the point of death." It was as though he said to him, ``It would be no use if You delay." This is limited faith, yet Christ did not put it out. Isaiah said concerning Him, ``A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench" (Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20).

Chrysostom said in one of his sermons, ``Why did Christ go to the house of the centurion but did not go the house of the nobleman?" He answered his question, saying, ``The centurion had a great faith, but the nobleman had a weak faith. Christ wanted to strengthen the man's faith, so He healed his son from afar off, to

make him sure that He had the authority and power over everything."

Christ deals with us in different ways that are dependent on our situation, circumstances and measure of faith. We cannot say to him, ``Why did You do this with one person, but did not do the same way with me?" The Lord has many ways of dealing with every one of us according to our circumstances and situations. He even deals with you in many and different ways.

2. The power of Christ:

The father said, ``My son is at the point of death. Come down before he dies!" But Christ said, ``Your son is alive." Christ's word was completely contradictory to the visible reality! But His word carries His authority, for this is the meaning of Christ's title as the ``Word," since He carries all the authority of the Lord. Therefore, Jesus said, ``He who has seen Me has seen the father" (John 14:9).

``No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). We have the written word of God in the Bible; it has God's authority to save souls by the work of the Holy Spirit. We have the living Word, as well; the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Saviour. The Saviour and His word are working among us.

Christ's word ``Your son lives" performed two miracles at least: the first is healing the weakness of the nobleman's faith, and the second is healing the weakness of the sick son who was lying on his deathbed! The word of Christ does not initiate one miracle only, but many miracles. Every miracle we see is in fact a group of miracles. The more we meditate on them, the more they react with our hearts to strengthen and increase our faith, and heal our sickness and take it away.

Christ has the authority in spite of the distance. At a distance of 30

kilometres, at the same moment, at one o'clock in the afternoon, the sick son was healed.

3. Christ's wisdom:

The father asked Christ to heal his son in a certain way, but Christ healed him in a different way. His request was: "Come down with me before my son dies." Christ, however, did not go down to Capernaum, but healed the son right there from Cana, to teach us a great lesson: how to submit ourselves to His wisdom and say to Him, "Let it not be according to my will, but according to Your will; for Yours is the good, pleasing and perfect one. If You grant me my request the same way I asked it, I will be the loser. But if You grant me my request as You want to do it, then I will have gained everything!"

Let us learn how to put our trust in Christ's compassion, power and wisdom.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, perform in our lives a miracle of healing from all our sicknesses: from the sickness of sin through forgiveness, from the sickness of anxiety through security, and from the sickness of haste through waiting for the Lord.

Give us spiritual health, and let our bodies always be a temple for the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify two differences between the miracle of turning water into wine and this miracle.
2. Why did not the Gospel mention the mother in the story of healing the sick son?
3. What is our responsibility towards those in our families that are older than we?

4. How did the nobleman's faith start, increase and how was it perfected?
5. Christ did not put out the nobleman's faith, but rather kindled it. How?
6. Why did Christ go to the centurion's house, but not to the nobleman's house?
7. Christ healed the sick son differently from what his father asked. What do you learn from this?

THE THIRD MIRACLE

GREAT CATCH OF FISH

¹One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God; ²He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. ¹⁰And so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him (Luke 5:1-11, see also Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20).

Christ performed His first miracle at a wedding, the second in the presence of the shadow of death, and the third on the shore of the Lake Gennesaret. The name of this lake means "the Princess of the Gardens", because there are ten populous and prosperous cities around it with fruitful gardens. It is a place of happiness and joy.

This lake is also called "the Sea of Galilee" or "Lake Tiberias". It is 20 kilometres long, 13 kilometres wide and situated 230 meters

below sea level. Therefore, it has a tropical climate. The winds that blow over it change completely and unexpectedly, without any previous warning signs.

Christ performed many of His miracles around this lake while moving from shore to shore. He calmed the storm there and gave His disciples an abundant catch of fish. From that lake, standing in a small boat, He addressed the crowds gathered on its shore. He compensated Peter, the owner of the boat by giving him many fish. In fact, Christ's working relationship with Peter began with the miracle of the great catch of fish here. His working relationship with him during His existence on earth ended with another miracle of a catch of fish (John 21), when He charged him with shepherding His sheep.

In this miracle we concentrate on two persons:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The assets of the person in need:

Peter owned a boat standing on the shore. The fishermen had disembarked from it and were washing their nets after having spent the whole night fishing without catching anything. This is a situation of discouragement and exhaustion. The boat was given to Christ in order that He might make it a pulpit and address the multitudes from it. One commentator has said: ``The fisher of souls was out at sea in a boat while the souls He was fishing for were standing on the ground, on the shore of the lake. The heavenly preacher throws the net of the Gospel to gather the souls into His kingdom from death to life." We may see in the boat presented to Christ a silent expression of Peter saying in effect: ``The word you preach from the boat and from outside it give eternal life."

An empty boat was given to Christ, and lo and behold! it became overflowing with fish, so much that the nets were about to break, and the fishermen had to ask another boat to come along and help them. They came and filled the two boats to the point of sinking! An empty boat given to Christ was filled with more than Peter expected. Is this not the situation of all of us? When our hands are empty we open them to Christ and He fills them. If only we would offer everything we have to Him, not because He is in need of it, but in order that He might bless it. If we fail in something, let's surrender it to the Lord. When our health fails, offer the body to the Lord to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. If our work fails, offer it up to the Lord that He may bless it because it becomes His work. The shares in Peter's boat were entirely Peter's. But when he offered them to Christ, they all became Christ's. Peter, then, became a successful partner with Christ. If all the shares are ours we will not succeed. But if we give them all to Christ, He will bless them, and we become His partners and partakers of His success.

Let us offer our bodies to Him to be a living, holy acceptable sacrifice, that they may become healthy, blessed and filled with the plenitude of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:1).

2. The faith of the person in need:

a. Peter began his life with Christ by becoming His follower. When his brother Andrew told him: ``We have found the Messiah" he followed Christ immediately. Though Peter was admitted into the fellowship of Christ, he continued to live in his home and practice his trade as a fisherman.

But the day Christ told him, ``move out a little from land," he experienced something new: he became a disciple of Christ. Jesus sat in Peter's boat teaching the multitudes. Then He told him: ``Do not be afraid! From now you will catch men." So he left all things and followed Christ. He had been a follower; now he

became a full-time disciple of Christ. Peter left all things in order to follow Him. Later he made more progress in his faith, becoming an apostle of Christ.

b. Peter began his walk of faith in such astonishment and amazement at this miracle. He said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Later, having made progress in his faith, he said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). He began by fearing Christ and His holiness. Christ told him: "Do not fear me and my holiness, for I will wash you and cleanse your heart." Peter learned his lesson and said: "Do not leave my boat. Stay with me." There had certainly been progress and development in Peter's spiritual life. Peter said: "I want myself and my boat to be at your service. Stay in my boat, because I need your daily sanctification and spiritual refreshment." Great progress had taken place in the boat and in the owner of the boat. The boat and its owner had become the property of Christ.

c. Peter and all those who were with him were gripped with amazement at the catch of fish. We also need to be dazzled by Christ, always astonished by His dealings with us and always eager to thank Him for everything at all times. Let us learn from Peter to be always dazzled by every gift from God. Our life with God should be radiate our amazement at God's gifts. He continually stretches out His hand towards us with blessing "and there shall be amazement at Him in all His faithful ones" (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

d. After this surprise comes the divine promise: "Do not be afraid! From now on you will catch men." Everyone who comes to know Christ deeply is promoted from being a fisher of fish to being a fisher of men. Take the promotion of plants: when animals eat them, plants are promoted from the kingdom of plants to the kingdom of animals. When man eats an animal, he promotes the

animal to the human kingdom because it becomes cells of the human body. When we commit ourselves to God and give our God the right to all we own, we say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). We become partakers of divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Let us give ourselves fully to God and commit everything we have to Him that His authority over us may be perfect, to bring us from the human kingdom to the divine kingdom, into which Christ wants to bring us.

Among the promotions which Christ wants to give us is the promotion from mere "breadwinners" to "those who do God's will". There are children who complain because their fathers are too busy providing for their material needs to care for them! There are wives who complain about their husbands because they leave the house early in the morning and don't come back until late at night, eating the bread of sorrows (Psalm 127:2). All the while God wants to make them holy people, since they chose the good part which shall not be taken from them (Luke 10:42). This "good part" does not isolate them from the world and does not fail them, but makes everything increase for them (Matthew 6:33).

e. Peter's consecration was completed when he left everything and followed Christ. While you are busy here and there God is asking you to spend more time in worship or to think more deeply about someone who needs salvation, in order to speak to him. If you want satisfaction in your life, be a faithful follower of Christ.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ attracts people:

The multitude was crowding around Him to hear the Word of God from Him. There is a special attraction about Jesus. Among the most enjoyable years of my life were those I spent preparing "The Life of Christ" series of books for publication, then for broadcasting. An intense friendship developed with an awesome beauty, whose influence still impresses my heart. When Christ

attracts you, you meditate on Him and ``crowd around Him". This is the attraction of Christ which never ceases. He has said: ``And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself" (John 12:32).

As you know, magnetism attracts metal and not stone. But even though you may feel that you are like a stone, ask God to work a change within you which will eliminate from you anything which hinders your being attracted to Him, in order that you may ``crowd around Him".

2. Christ in need:

He needed Peter's boat, and sat down in it to teach the people. He needed the experience of a fisherman to take the boat out into the lake. He was capable of creating a boat and ordering a wave to take it out from land, but He wanted to honour and bless Peter. When the Lord asks something from us, He does not ask it because He is incapable of doing it, but because He wants to make us share in His ministry. Let us be wise enough to say: ``I will give the Lord the boat of my life, and if it is empty, He will return it to me full. With Him my weary soul can rest and the thirst of my heart can be quenched."

3. Christ, the holder of authority:

a. He held authority over Peter. He said to him: ``Take the boat out from the shore. Go out to the deep." Then He ordered him: ``Throw out the net." And Peter obeyed. There is power and attraction in Jesus. If you hear His voice you will ®nd that you want to obey Him, not only because it is to your advantage, but because there is authority in Christ's word, ``for the word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Let us read God's Word and we shall see its authority in our life.

b. The authority of Christ over the ®sh: There were no ®sh at the

place where they were fishing. Furthermore, fishing is done at night. Nevertheless, the fish gathered at Christ's command.

Peter's success in fishing was not caused by any favourable circumstances, but by his obedience to the word of Christ, the holder of authority. You also can succeed, not because of the circumstances, however favourable they maybe, but because of the blessing which He gives you. I hope you will agree with whatever Christ has for you by His word. Blessing is always upon the obedient. God ordered Elijah to go to the river Cherith saying: "I have commanded the ravens to feed you there" (1 Kings 17:4). The word "there" is the key: Not where you want to be, but where He wants you to be.

4. Christ's love:

a. Christ encouraged Peter. He told him: "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." Peter was astonished by the catch of fish, fearing because of his sin. Christ encouraged him with words of love. He said: "Do not fear. I will cleanse your heart. I will promote you." These words keep coming to us as we face an exam, or an interview for a job, or before undergoing a surgical operation, or when we will become parents for the first time, or when we send our children to school for the first time, or when we have them married and leaving the nest of our home, or when we are about to be retire and leave our job. How we need these words! In every experience we have not already undergone before we hear the voice of love in our ears: "Do not fear. From now on..."

b. "From now on..." presents another proof of Christ's love. There is divine timing here. Why didn't Christ say to Peter: "From now on you will catch men" as soon as Andrew called him to follow Christ? Answer: Because Christ was preparing Peter for the suitable moment.

c. Christ declared His love to Peter when He called him to a

specific ministry: fishing for men. Peter's self-esteem, then, increased. His prestige in his family and society went up. God gave him a great position in the Kingdom of Heaven.

d. Then Christ declared His love to Peter by giving him many fish: Does the renting of a boat for a few hours merit the enormous compensation that Peter received? If Christ had rented the boat from which He preached, He would have paid the equivalent of one dinar, but He filled Peter's boat with fish. He kept the nets from bursting and the two boats from sinking. What a compensation! Whoever gives a glass of cold water in His name shall by no means lose his reward (Matthew 10:42). Have you ever felt regret at something good you have done and not found recompense and gratitude? Do not regret, for you will receive recompense from the Lord. Christ is the One Who compensates.

e. Then let us consider Christ Who sees the future: Christ said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when was full, they drew to the shore, and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age" (Matthew 13:47-49). We see in this miracle a prophetic parable: The fishers are the apostles who bring God's word to every age. The boat is the Church. The net is the Gospel. The sea is the world. The shore is eternity. The only difference is that the fishers catch fish that die, while the servants of Christ catch people that they may live. One day, the net will be pulled up. There will be good and bad people in it, for the Church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. The bad are separated and the good taken for the Kingdom. Which side do you belong to, then? Have you offered up your soul and your boat and your family to Christ?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you with all our heart

because you love us and care for our needs, even before we know them! You grant it to us even before we ask for it! And when you give you grant generously and do not reproach.

Grant that we may always find the right way toward you, for we submit our souls to you and surrender our will to yours so that we can be filled with blessing and grace, and receive from you grace above grace. In the name of Christ. Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the Sea of Galilee.
2. What happens when we surrender ourselves to Christ?
3. What happens when we surrender what we have to Christ?
4. Name a development that took place in Peter's faith.
5. What was Christ's commission for Peter?
6. Why did Christ borrow Peter's boat instead of creating a boat?
7. What was Christ's compensation for Peter?

THE FOURTH MIRACLE

HEALING PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

¹⁴ When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. ¹⁵ He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him (Matthew 8:14,15, see also Mark 1:29 and Luke 4:38).

Christ performed His first miracle before a great number of people, in a house crowded with guests, during a wedding party.

His second miracle (healing the son of the nobleman from afar) took place in Cana while the patient was lying in Capernaum.

As to this miracle (healing Peter's mother-in-law), Jesus performed it when standing beside her bed, in a house in Capernaum, in the presence of just a small number of friends and relatives.

On a Sabbath in the city of Capernaum, the city lying on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, after the religious service in the synagogue and after Christ had finished delivering His sermon, He returned to Peter's house where He was staying. The disciple had a house of his own, while the Teacher had nowhere to lay his head. Yet He is the One in authority in heaven and on earth! When Peter offered the house to his Teacher, Christ honoured him by working the miracle of healing in his house. Peter gave his ship to Christ so that He could preach from it, and He filled the ship with fish. When he put Him up in his house, He honoured Peter by a miracle of healing that brought gladness to their hearts. Peter's mother-in-law had a high fever, but Christ took her hand, raised her up and she was instantly healed and rose up to serve the household. The evangelist Matthew says, ``That it might be fulfilled that was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (see Isaiah 53:4). This was a prophecy that had been spoken more than seven hundred years

before the birth of the Messiah, and was fulfilled in Peter's house. It also can be fulfilled in the house of every one of us.

Meditating on this miracle we will consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The witnesses of the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. Peter's mother-in-law was bedridden and unable to complain to Christ:

Her body had a "high fever" as Luke describes it. Her frail body must have been shivering, and perhaps she thought she was not important enough to ask Him to heal her. Many of the old people think they are not important anymore, but there is no one without importance in the Lord's eyes. A small child is important in Jesus's eyes even if the disciples drove his parents away when they carried him to Christ, for He said to His disciples, "Let the children come to Me" (Matthew 19:14). Anyone who is advanced in years should not think to himself that he is not important, because Christ provides him with blessing and grace. He carries him to his gray hairs (Isaiah 46:4).

There were three known kinds of fever at that time; the first of them was called "the Maltese fever". This causes weakness and anaemia that would last for months, and leads to death. There was also another kind that was similar to our typhoid fever. Beside these there was the malaria fever which was transmitted by the mosquitoes that bred in the area where the Jordan River meets the sea of Galilee. Fever in all its kinds was widespread in both Capernaum and Tiberias.

2. This severe fever rendered the lady speechless, so they spoke for her:

There are some who need Christ without realising their need. What

they are asking for is available with Christ, but no one points them to the way. This is the Christians' responsibility. Maybe we are not sensitive to the need of our society; for many people do ask about our faith, but we dodge the answer, either because we are not used to answering or because we do not know how to answer. But first of all, we should be sensitive to our surroundings, so that we might be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks us to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). I do not think that there is a Christian clerk in an office that was not asked by his neighbour, ``How did you do this good deed in spite of being mistreated?" Most probably the inquirer would not get a sufficient answer from the Christian. And even if he does, the answer may be superficial or inadequate!

3. Christ touched the hand of this lady, and she rose up and served them:

I wonder what kind of service Peter's mother-in-law did? It was not a great and famous service like the service of Mary, Aaron's sister who led the singing (Exodus 15:20). It was not like the service of Deborah the judge of Israel, for she received no training or divine call to be a judge for her people (Judge 4:4). I do not think, either, that she did a service like Ruth's or Hannah's (Samuel's mother) service, or like the service of Queen Esther. The number of famous people is few. But there is a large number of ordinary believers who do ordinary services that are important and necessary, even if they were not famous. The Lord records in the Gospel the service of Peter's mother-in-law who helped in the kitchen, in cleaning the house, or washing the dishes after the guests had eaten. This is a simple thing that the Gospel honours because our daily work is holy. The lady who prepares food for her household, or changes her child's clothes and offers him Christian love, does in fact a holy service equal to that of the pastor of the church who preaches or administers communion to the people. All these jobs are important and necessary, since they reveal the love of God to the world

which was poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that was given us (Romans 5:5). The book of Acts speaks of Dorcas who used to make clothes for the poor (Acts 9:36-42). It also speaks of Mary the mother of John Mark who offered her house to be a church (Acts 12:12). The apostle John speaks in his second epistle of the chosen lady whose ministry was to raise up her children. There are many simple services that people do not appreciate, and those who do them may look upon them as being too simple to even mention. But the divine grace mentions them since it wants us to appreciate ourselves, and appreciate our fellow believers. Above all, let us realise that heaven appreciates the service which we do, however small it may be, as long as the motive for it is the love of Christ and devotion to Him.

There are many other services which we can do, such as serving at home, raising up the children, serving the sick and elderly who are lonely. Give a word of encouragement on behalf of Christ. Give a smile in Christ's name. (Read Matthew 25:34-40.)

Peter's mother-in-law was great as she used her regained health in serving Christ.

The Irish poet Oscar Wilde (d. 1900) wrote a short story that he described as the most beautiful short story in the world. In this story he said:

Christ went from the white valley to the gray city, and saw a drunkard lying down on the street. He asked him, "Why do you destroy your life drinking?" He answered, "I was a leper, and You healed me. But when you restored my health I found nothing to do!" ... Christ then went to another street in the same city, and saw a young man pursuing a prostitute, and asked him, "Why do you destroy your life in depravity?" He answered Him, "I was blind, and You opened my eyes. In what can I possibly use my eyes other than in this I am doing now?" Then Christ saw an old man sitting on the ground and weeping. He asked him, "What do you

do, and why are you weeping?" He answered, ``You raised me up from the dead; and what can I possibly be doing but weep?"

I think that his painful story reminds us of many people who received the blessings of God and misused them. But we thank God that Peter's mother-in-law was not one of these!

II. THE WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. Peter:

Peter was already a disciple of Christ, and had a home of his own. He first offered himself to Christ, then his boat, and lastly his house. How happy is the man whose whole life belongs to Christ! For then Christ makes a better life, and He becomes the aim of that life. Happy is the man who surrenders himself to the Lord completely and unconditionally, for then the Lord becomes responsible for that man's life. He carries a responsibility that we cannot carry. He, then, holds the reins of our affairs, carrying our worries, forgiving our sins and bestowing upon us eternal life.

Yet, the Lord allowed sickness to come into Peter's house. It is also for a purpose that He allows the sickness of our bodies, or the fatigue of our souls. In His divine wisdom, He allows some painful things, because He wants to form our lives in a certain way, of which pain must be a part! It is above what we can grasp or explain, but the crisis is lifted. We discover that it was one of the most important things that shaped our lives so that we could be in the divine will. Although sickness is undesirable, it causes sympathy among the residents when it comes into a home. Perhaps a father forgot to pray because of the pressures of his work. But the sickness of his son makes him bow down in prayer. The father who spends all his time earning money, when his son gets sick, spends all the money he earned to restore his son's health. Sickness wakes a person up to realise that it is not by bread and money alone that man lives, but by the word of God.

Sickness brings out the good potential qualities in us. Often we have inside us good qualities, but worry, preoccupation, seeking after one's livelihood and caring for daily problems cover them with dust. Sickness comes to remove this dust and the potential good in us comes forth. Then we realise that it was God who placed this good in us, and that He is the One who develops it by the work of His Holy Spirit, when we allow Him to do this in us.

Peter's family got together and united in the face of sickness because Peter's sick mother-in-law needed help. Sickness is not all evil. It is not good, but it produces a lot of good. If we realise that everything we go through is ordained by God, we would be able to say, ``Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them" (Isaiah 3:10). ``And we know that all things work together for the good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). This is Peter, Christ's disciple, who offered himself, his ship and his house to the Lord. But the Lord allowed sickness to come in order to bless Peter himself more, and to bless us also as we meditate upon what happened with Peter.

2. The believers who were friends of Peter:

The story, as St. Mark narrates it, goes like this: ``But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with fever, and they told Him about her at once" (Mark 1:30), since they were conscious of His love and power. Had He loved without power, He wouldn't have had the ability to heal. Had He been powerful without love, He wouldn't have cared to heal. But since He is both powerful and loving, His power was always subservient to His love. Therefore they went to Him and ``told Him about her at once."

Pain and sickness make us tell Christ about our situation. We sometimes take the credit for our success ourselves. But to whom shall we take our troubles? We may be proud when our own sun has risen and refer our success to ourselves. But when we fail and are troubled, we hear this precious word of His ``Call upon Me in

the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15).

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ's humility:

In the home of the poor fisherman, where the fish reeked, and in front of the shivering body of a feverish woman, He performed the miracle. Usually we like people to see us doing a great work, but all of Christ's concern is for the one in need, for He did not come to be served, but rather to serve and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

It costs Him some effort to perform the miracle. There was power that went out of Him to heal. He was willing to grant the blessings of power to Peter's mother-in-law, for Christ does not know the word "too simple" or "too small to be healed".

2. Christ's power:

He is a specialist in everything. "They brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick" (Matthew 8:16).

He performs the miracle before a small crowd of people in the house, or performs miracles for many on the streets or in the open. It does not matter with Him; for He is the One who calls to Himself all those who labour and are heavy laden to give them rest (Matthew 11:28). Wherever you are and however your state might be, He is able to help you.

3. Christ's family:

Christ once asked, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers? ... For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50). Christ had called Peter to follow Him, then to be an apostle for Him. He did

not tell Peter to leave his wife and she travelled with him in his ministry (1 Corinthians 9:5).

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-220), the founder of the Alexandrian school of theology, said that Peter and his wife were martyred together, and that they killed her before they killed him. Peter called her by name and told her, ``Remember the Lord."

Christ sanctified the family, the marriage and the home, and has made the believers His family, flesh of His flesh and bones of His bones (Ephesians 5:30).

4. Christ's compassion:

On hearing the request of the people of the sick woman, Mark says that ``He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them" (Mark 1:31). He took her by the hand to show His compassion and power and to emphasise that He is the source of her healing. Often times, after receiving many blessings from God, we think that we got them from another source. He then comes in and assures us that it is He who takes care of us, and has compassion for us, so that in case we needed Him later on, we would be able to return to Him. Let us bear in mind that the one who comes to Him, He will by no means cast him out (John 6:37).

5. Christ's revelation:

Christ's presence makes us feel our need. Unless Christ was there, they would not have thought of seeking healing for her from sickness. Sickness makes us depressed, but the presence of Christ makes us think positively and uncover a mountain resting inside us, of which we saw only the top part: a mountain of problems, and another mountain of His love for us and our love for Him. Then we run for refuge with Him from our troubles, and to His love.

Christ's presence in Peter's ship revealed his sin. He asked Christ

to leave the ship. Christ's presence in Peter's house revealed to Peter the existence of the healing power, which made them ask Him to heal her.

Christ called a married man, an individual named Peter, and blessed his whole house and healed his mother-in-law. Later He blessed the whole town by His presence in one of its houses (Mark 1:33). He justified Peter, and through the one righteous man He blessed all those around him. Thanks for the revelation of Christ.

And now, what do all these teachings mean to you personally?

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, You want to make me a blessing. So fill me up with Your grace. Make me Your disciple, bless my home through me and bless my country through my home. Give me spiritual sensitivity that would make me aware of the need of my society, that I may share this good news with all, so that Your glory may be lifted up over all the earth. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Where did Christ perform this miracle? What do we learn from that?
2. Write a Scripture verse with its reference that proves God cares for the old people.
3. What was the service which Peter's mother-in-law rendered after she got healed?
4. What is God's purpose for sickness?
5. What do we learn from Peter's friends?
6. Who are the spiritual family of Jesus?
7. How was the blessing of Jesus extended from Peter to all Peter's city?

THE FIFTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE LEPER

⁴⁰A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."⁴¹ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning.⁴⁴ "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere (Mark 1:40-45, see also Matthew 8:2-4 and Luke 5:12-16).

In this miracle Jesus heals a person sick with leprosy whom the physician evangelist Luke describes as being "full of leprosy" in its final stages. Leprosy had filled his whole body. Leprosy is a skin disease that affects the members it afflicts in such a way that the patient's extremities, knuckles, nose, and palate start falling off. Leprosy manifests itself at first as a swelling or a bright spot with corroded edges that sink lower than the skin itself, and the hair that grows from it turns white (Leviticus 13).

Leprosy was a curse, which the Jews considered as punishment from God. This happened with Miriam, Aaron's sister (Numbers 12) and with Gehazi, Elisha's servant (2 Kings 5). A leper who thought he got healed was supposed to get a healing certificate from the priest before he could rejoin society. A leper was rejected by society, and was forced to get out of town and live by himself or with a group of leprosy-stricken people. Whenever a healthy man would approach him, a leper should shout aloud, "Leper! Leper!" so that the healthy man would go away from him. The Jews,

therefore, always connected sin and leprosy, for leprosy was uncleanness that kept man away from society and from the house of God. There was no known remedy for leprosy. A leper would, therefore, spend time with no hope outside populated societies, waiting for his limbs to fall off and die. This is the man who was never to be touched.

This man who was full of leprosy came to Christ and knelt down before Him, saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." He had no doubt in Christ's ability, but he doubted His love. He knew that if Christ wanted, He could cleanse him. Christ was moved with compassion for him, stretched out His hand and touched him. This is forbidden according to the Mosaic Law, but the Lord of the Law who is also the Lord of the Sabbath stretched out His hand and touched him lovingly, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. Jesus warned him not to tell anybody about this miracle, but the man did not obey, and rather went out proclaiming the matter in every place telling what Christ had done. He had no right at all to break the commandment of the Physician who healed him, but he was so possessed of his emotions that he could not obey the command given him. As a result, many gathered around Christ and He had to go out of the city of Capernaum, for the people pressed Him too much. Christ told the leper who was healed to go to the priest, who held an office that resembled our present-day hygienist, so as to give him a certificate of healing in order to go back to the society that rejected him. At the same time, he was supposed to offer a sacrifice with the priest for the cleansing he received from his disease, as thanksgiving for his healing. The patient went to the priest and received his certificate of healing.

Meditating on this miracle we will consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. His feeling of need:

It was his feeling of need that directed him to Christ. He knew that medicine could not heal him the like of him were medically hopeless cases. The man was unable to work because society did not allow a leper to enter and work among it. What a poor man! He lost his health and his source of income too! And for good measure, society rejected him; he was unwanted by all. In such a situation, a man loses his self-respect and despises himself.

The feeling of need is what brings us to Christ, for those who are well or those who think they are so feel no need of a physician. Christ came, therefore, not to call the righteous or those who thought they were righteous but those who discover they are sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17).

This leper gives us a clear picture of the sinner who is far away from the Lord, who does not respect himself, and finding no remedy around him, he turns to the only physician who can treat him Christ. Sin is shame, as leprosy is shame. Sin is a danger to the one involved, as leprosy is the same. The result of sin is death, as the result of leprosy is death without hope.

2. His sound evaluation of the physician:

The man's fear of rejection did not prevent him from taking his entreaty to Christ. Many people consider themselves so wicked, and this prevents them from turning to the Saviour. But this ought not prevent them from going to Christ at all, however the situation may be, even if we thought He is going to reject us.

We here see how the leper evaluated the physician. He had heard of the God of love and mercy, (this miracle is the fifth one Christ performed in the chronological order of events). He must have heard of the four preceding miracles Christ performed, and realised he was before the God of love and mercy, the representative of heaven who does what no other can do.

So he was drawn to Christ. And in humility he knelt down and bowed before Him, in spite of the fact that bowing down caused him excruciating pain in his sick, semi-dead muscles.

He expressed his faith in Christ's power and presented a clear-cut request: "I cannot cure myself; no other can cure me. But You, if You want, can make me clean." He took a decision to come to Christ, and he was accepted and experienced healing.

This man expressed his situation to Christ honestly when he said, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." He realised the uncleanness of his state and asked for purification. He also expressed his confidence: "You can." He confessed the difficulty that stood in his way to Christ: "If You are willing." He was true to himself in that he confessed his uncleanness and was true with Christ in that he expressed his confidence in Christ's power, and his doubt as to His love for him!

The man's expression of his true state of affairs was practical. We see misery in the presence of mercy, impotence kneeling down to grace, sickness bowing to the physician, and faith calling love.

3. The leper got healed:

Christ was moved with compassion for the leper, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him. Christ has the authority over sickness, nature, death and demons. Here Christ demonstrated His absolute authority. What gladdens our hearts, however, is that the leper had given up the reins of the situation to Christ, for he knelt before Him and implored Him.

4. The leper, however, did not obey Christ's instructions:

The leper did what he ought not have done. Christ told him not to tell anyone about the his miracle of healing, but he went out declaring what Christ did with him. His disobedience forced Jesus

out of Capernaum, where he had found a place to rest His body. The leper's continual declaration of Christ's work made the multitudes swarm around Christ, which caused Him to go away. It was rational of Christ to ask the man to keep silent, but the leper could not understand the reason. He did what he thought was right. He could have given another person the opportunity to witness about what happened with him, but he wanted to do it himself.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ's spontaneous and immediate love that does not put off anyone asking for help:

It never happened that a man came to Christ and went away empty-handed. He says, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). The leper was wondering about Christ's willingness, and Christ answered him in love, "I am willing; be cleansed." You ask and Christ answers, breaking all the obstacles between you and Him, for there are no obstacles between Christ and the sinner. The obstacle always stands between the sinner and Christ. But God is asking to reconcile us to Himself, even if we did not ask for it. He did not oppose us. He never hated us, never put us off however our sins were, but it is we who are delayed from going to Him because of our sins.

2. Christ's touch:

a. He touched him with the touch of divine power. In an English poem titled "A Touch of the Master's Hand" we read a story of an old violin that was put on sale, and the people were not willing to pay much for it because it was old. Suddenly a musician came and gazed at the violin, and recognised it as his music teacher's violin. He picked it up and played on it a wonderful piece that made the price of the violin increase at once, and many wanted to buy the old violin. The reason for this difference in price was the "Touch of the Master's Hand." Christ who gave the touch had this

Master's Hand that lifted the rejected leper's value and made him a new whole man.

b. Christ's touch of the sick man was a visible sign that assured the sick man of Christ's love. Since the time he had this disease no healthy person wanted to touch him at all. But Christ assured him, ``People have deserted you; as for me, I love you. No one wants to touch you; but I touch you to bless you." Each time we see someone getting baptised in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each time we sit around the Lord's table for the holy communion, we see and receive something tangible that shows us the love of God. Christ always touches our minds and hearts to assure us of His love. That is a true touch of blessing, because the power of Christ underlying it grants us blessing and grace.

c. Christ's touch cleanses from contamination. Christ touched the leper without getting contaminated, as He touched the dead man without the coldness of death flowing into His warm hand that is rich in love. Christ was like a ray of light going through a polluted environment, being utterly clean!

It has been told that an Italian nun dreamt of an angel who came to her and opened her eyes to see the people as they really are. She said, ``I wish the angel had not done so, because I hate what I saw!" But suddenly came Christ with His wounds, and all those who touched Christ were cleansed, and she said, ``Now I understand what I saw!" It was a bad image of people's sin, but how beautiful is the grace of Christ that restores a sick man to health! Christ still touches people's hands so that they may do good, their lips so that they may speak well, their eyes so that they may see the needs of others, their ears so that they may hear His encouraging voice, and their feet so that they may go to the places that need to be ministered to. His touch is still rich in experience, power and love, because He touches those that sin led astray and brings them back to the kingdom of His love.

One saint said, ``God stretched out His hand and touched human nature with His incarnation. He came as a man amongst us." ``Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15).

3. Christ's power:

Christ is the Word of God, and the word always carries the authority of its speaker: ``I am willing; be cleansed." And as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him and the sick man was cleansed. We saw Christ heal the nobleman's son with a word from afar off (John 4), and heal Peter's mother-in-law being near her (Matthew 8). Christ has the authority that uses different ways. Here, He showed mercy, stretched out His hand, and touched; and by the touch and the word the leper got healed.

Every sick person Christ healed demonstrates Christ's objection to sickness, sin and death. God created us to live his life, and sin came into the world corrupting what God had designed. Christ now comes to restore things to their original state; He came that we may have life that we may have it to the best. If we missed the aim for which God brought us into being, and if we have disappointed heaven, Christ comes to us to give us a new chance of health and progress in doing God's will.

4. Christ's request:

Let us consider Christ's request of the leper who got healed not to tell anyone about his healing. While we read in the command of Christ to the man whom He delivered of demons: ``Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you" (Mark 5:19). Why then did He order the leper whom He healed not to talk, while He ordered the man who was delivered of demons to do so? Christ

commissions everyone with what he should do and with what he can do. We do not know why, but we realise that the members of Christ's body have various functions according to the different gifts given to them from Him. He may tell you to do something and tell your neighbour not to do the same, or vice versa. What is required of us is to be open to the commands of the Holy Spirit so as to see what God commissions us to do. John Chrysostom once said, ``Perhaps Christ did not want the leper to proclaim the news of his healing so as to keep him from boasting of his virtues and to hide them. Or maybe at that time He did not want the crowds to run to Him and impede His teaching." Our duty is to wait for what He tells us to do. We do it as He wants it done. ``Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5).

5. Christ fulfils the Law:

Christ is above the Law; He touched the leper without being ritually defiled. Yet Christ submitted to the Law, for He came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it. He told the leper to go the priest and offer for his healing what Moses commanded as a testimony to them (Leviticus 14:9,10,21-23). He wanted the man to get his healing certificate before the society.

We conclude our meditation on this miracle by remarking that there is a great similarity between sin and leprosy. Leprosy is an incurable disease, and sin is something people did not have a cure for. Leprosy separates a man from society, and the sinner is like an island that is cut off from those around him. When our first father Adam saw Eve, he wrote poetry for her, but when sin entered his heart he forgot the poetry he wrote and said, ``The woman whom You gave me!" He blamed it all on her! Sin makes man self-centred and inconsiderate to others. It is the Lord who can heal us, bring us back to our society, good and fitting for life as light to the world and salt to the earth.

Do you see your sin? Do you see the love of your God? Will you run for Him to forgive you?

PRAYER

Our heavenly, loving, good and holy Father, You open Your hands and fill us with good. Give rest to our hearts when we come into contact with You. Give peace to our bodies when we come into touch with Your love; so that You may heal our sicknesses, strengthen our weaknesses and become inspired by You. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Write out a description of leprosy.
2. "The leper trusted in Christ's love, but he doubted Christ's love." Complete this statement.
3. Write three similarities between leprosy and sin.
4. The leper expressed his feelings towards Christ. Write three sentences describing this expression.
5. Why did Christ tell the leper not to tell anyone about his healing?
6. Identify three descriptions of the way Christ touched the leper who got healed.
7. Explain how Christ's power was manifested in this miracle.

THE SIXTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE PARALYTIC

¹A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ``Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷``Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, ``Why are you thinking these things. ⁹Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, `Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, `Get up, take your mat and walk'? ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, ¹¹``I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹²He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ``We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12, see also Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26).

According to the chronological order of events, which most of the commentators believe, this is the sixth miracle Christ performed. It is the miracle of healing a paralytic who was let down from the roof to where Christ was sitting. This miracle took place in Capernaum, most probably in Peter's house. Christ was born in Bethlehem, reared up in Nazareth, which rejected Him, and moved to the house of His disciple Peter to stay. How great are the blessings which this house that received Him got; but at the same time how great the price that Peter and his family paid when he opened his

house for the Lord! The house turned into a place of public service: it became a school, a hospital and a church.

When Christ healed the leper, He commanded him not to tell anyone. The healed leper, however, did not implement Christ's command, but rather went out declaring everywhere that Christ healed him. As a result of this declaration, which sprang from the leper's gratitude for his physician, people came where Jesus stayed from every quarter. The news about Jesus' teachings and miracles reached the ears of the Jewish elders in Jerusalem, so they sent a group of scribes to watch Christ and write a report about Him: Who was He? Was He a sorcerer? Was it by the power of the devil that He drove out demons? Who was He? Peter's house was crowded with scribes, friends, needy people and the disciples. There were followers of Christ, as there were also opponents of Him. The miracle of healing the paralytic, therefore, shows us a big group of people to consider, whether these were merely inquisitive people, or opponents.

We will consider in this miracle:

1. The believers and the miracle
2. The witnesses and the miracle
3. The one in need of the miracle
4. Christ and the miracle

I. THE BELIEVERS AND THE MIRACLE

1. Simon Peter, the owner of the house:

He gave his house to the Lord, and the Lord blessed him and healed his mother-in-law. But we seldom settle down to think about the house that opens its door for serving Christ. The house was full of guests so that Peter did not even have a chance to be alone with his family. On the day when the paralytic got healed, a group came carrying the patient. They broke through the roof. Peter and the members of his household must have been given so much concentration and attention to Christ's teaching, but they

were compelled to raise their heads up to the ceiling of their house that was being broken through! And behold a bed with a man on it was coming down!

There is always a cost for following Christ. It is true that in following Him there is joy and happiness, but this demands a price that may be great sometimes! Peter looked at the broken roof, and the dust that was falling down from it. And behold a paralytic, whom he did not know, was becoming his guest, even though he entered by the roof because he could not enter by the door! Peter must have been happy in spite of all this. The prophet Isaiah says, "I have set watchmen on your walls O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day or night" (Isaiah 62:6). Have we thought about these watchmen? They are always in the service of those who live on the margin. The watchmen cannot go into the depth of the city, but remain at its walls near the gate to draw those who are far away, who want to draw near, and to keep the marginal ones who want to get out. These do not hold their peace day or night. This was Peter's house, that was open for Christ day and night.

If Christ told us to open our houses for Him, would we do as Peter did?

How great Peter's joy was when the paralytic guest left his house whole and sound, carrying his own bed! Peter's hospital, which Doctor Jesus ran, prospered!

2. The four carriers, the paralytic's friends:

a. The four decided to carry their beloved friend to where he could meet the healing physician. They carried the paralytic. These are loving men who sacrificed for their love and were not content with good wishes. They also believed in Christ's power of healing. They were, as well, resolute about what they were doing because they were utterly convinced of it. When they could not reach Christ on account of the crowd, they could have apologised to the patient, saying, "We carried you this far, and you can see for yourself that

we did all we could, but it did not work!" They insisted on taking their sick friend to Christ.

b. They were also creative. Diligence makes a person creative. Due to their insistence on taking the man to Christ, they thought of a daring and strange way to reach Christ. They decided to climb the outer steps that led to the roof of the house. Houses in Palestine consisted, for the most part, of a big, open hall surrounded with rooms, with an outer staircase leading to the upper room, which served as a guest's room on top of the roof. The four men carried the paralytic on the outer staircase to the roof. When they looked to the hall, they did not find Christ sitting in it, for He had sat under a roofed area. They, therefore, decided to break through the roof to let the paralytic down directly in front of Christ. Some roofs were made of dovetailed bricks that could be removed and put in place again. So the four carriers started to remove the dovetailed bricks from the roof, making enough room for the sick man to let down through.

We are indebted to these four carriers for they taught us an important lesson, namely that those who bring people to Christ the Saviour should be lovers and doers, not satisfied with love in mere words, but creative, insistent and self-denying.

c. But there was another quality that was necessary for the four carriers: they needed to be co-operative so that the paralytic's bed could be let down with balance and the sick man would not fall out of it. If one of them were in a hurry and his speed of letting down the bed was not in proportion with the speed of the other three, the paralytic would fall down and his bones would be broken, and Christ would then have to perform two miracles for the man: healing his paralysis, and mending his broken bones! These four teach us how we should cooperate as members of the church, and as a group of churches. There is a dream in the heart of all those who love Christ, which is the cooperation of the Christian

denominations to serve our world and the lost souls. And since this dream is much bigger than we can imagine it coming true, we say that the churches of one denomination cooperate together. But even this seems to be a difficult dream also, so we content ourselves to pray that God may make the members of one single meeting cooperative in love. And maybe this one meeting in a church is in need of love! So let's begin at the beginning and ask for peace of God inside us, so that there may not be civil wars between the man and himself. When man finds his inner peace with himself, he finds his peace with the family, then with the meeting he belongs to and the church he goes to, and with the denomination that his church belongs to, and then to all the Christian denominations throughout the world.

d. The four carriers were so cooperative, and did their job till it ended with a happy end: Christ healed the paralytic. They carried the paralytic with love, climbed the roof with him in faith, broke through the roof in boldness, and let the paralytic down with confidence in Christ's love. Here their role ended, so they kept silent and waited for Christ. Their request of Christ was a tangible, practical one; it was not written on paper, but it was a living man carried on a bed and tied by his four limbs with four cords, saying to Christ, "O God, have mercy upon me!"

e. I believe there is one more thing that the four carriers did that was not mentioned in the story: most probably they replaced the roof of Peter's house to its original state before being broken through. They had enough love to break through the roof, and I believe they had enough honesty to restore the broken roof to its original state.

II. THE WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. The scribes:

They came from Jerusalem to inquire who Jesus was: whether He was the coming Saviour, or a lying magician. When Christ saw the

paralytic and the faith of the four men, He started by saying, ``Son, your sins are forgiven you." There were some of the scribes who reasoned in their hearts, saying, ``Why does this Man speak blasphemies like these? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The scribes had the knowledge; they knew even how many ``alephs" were in their Hebrew Torah. They knew their book thoroughly, but their hearts were empty of grace! They accused Christ of being a blasphemer, which word means someone who defames men (1 Corinthians 4:13). But in the biblical Scriptures it applies to the person who takes the glory that is due to the Lord alone. The glory of forgiving sins is due to God alone, and behold Jesus says, ``Your sins are forgiven you." So, Christ took the glory that belonged to the Lord, and they said He spoke blasphemies! But we know that when Christ equalled Himself with God the Father, He did not consider it robbery (Philippians 2:6).

2. The guests of Peter's house:

They were astonished and glorified God, saying, ``We never saw anything like this!" They were astonished and amazed just like children. We need to turn back to the child's spirit when we are dealing with Christ, then we will be overwhelmed with the work of grace. We got so used to repeating the Lord's Prayer without considering what it means, and we also got used to partaking in the Lord's Supper as a routine habit. May God give us to be overwhelmed by it, and not share the Lord's communion in a routine way, or pray words that we got so used to that they no more move our hearts!

In their amazement, they glorified God and thanked Him, for they went through a special spiritual test that was filled with reverence to Christ. When we go through such a test, we sing the old known hymns in a new spirit and react to the old information in a new way. The words are the same, but the singer is no longer the same, for he has been transformed into a new man. They heard Christ say, ``But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth

to forgive sins," and they perceived in Him the second Adam. The first Adam led us astray, while the second Adam brings us back to our souls, and restores our souls to us. He brings us back the right standing with God which sin has destroyed. The second Adam is the Son of Man who brought us back our original glory! ``Son, your sins are forgiven you" through the atonement of the cross. What we lost in our first representative was brought back to us in our second representative: the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The paralytic was paralyzed:

He had life but he was not living. His breath entered his lungs but gave him no strength to rise up and carry out his daily work. He ate and drank but did not produce. He had no hope to be healed. Isn't this what sin does? We get the Lord's blessings, but we do not serve Him. Our breath, which God gave us, enters our lungs, but it does not produce in us any strength or energy to do something to serve Him. Many have been paralyzed by the past, through complexes, inferiority, phobias, worries and insecurity, so that they are now sitting around paralyzed, yet Christ wants to set them free from the bondage of the past to live in a new future without fear or sickness!

2. The sickness of the paralytic was evident for everyone:

The apostle says, ``Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later" (1 Timothy 5:24). That is, some people have evident sins, while the sins of others are hidden, but they are all sinners and are in need of God's grace. The sin and the sickness of this paralyzed man were evident.

3. This paralytic was a sinner who felt his sinfulness and knew that he sinned:

The physician of both body and soul diagnosed what was deeper

than the sickness of the body in the paralytic. When He saw the faith of the four carriers, He said to the paralytic, ``Son, your sins are forgiven you." In this case, sin was the cause of paralysis. Yet in other cases sickness was not the result of sin, as Christ said concerning the man who was born blind, ``Neither this man nor his parent sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in Him" (John 9:3). Here the sin of the paralytic was the cause of his sickness, and the sick man knew it. Christ does not heal the outward symptoms, but the root first.

4. The paralytic was forgiven first, and then he got healed:

The apostle James said, ``Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14,15). These two verses describe what happened to the paralytic who got healed: He obtained forgiveness first and then got healed. Many have enjoyed the healing of the body from Christ, but they have not obtained the forgiveness of their sins. On the other hand, some people today obtain forgiveness of sins but remain sick. The Lord, out of a special wisdom, does with us His good will.

The paralytic was justified by a word that was said to him and became a part of him, because he believed in the speaker of that word and was immediately healed. The bed had carried him, but now he carried his bed. The sign of his sickness became the proof of his health and wholeness. Those who refused to clear the way for him to Christ when he was trying to get to Him, cleared the way for him after his healing, so that he could walk and declare, ``He has healed me." He entered in being carried, and went out carrying the traces of God's grace and the proof of His power.

IV. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ knows:

He saw the faith of the four carriers, saw the sin of the paralytic, and said, ``Son, your sins are forgiven you." What they asked was the healing of the body, but the Lord saw another need before that, that is the forgiveness of sin, and He forgave it.

Those present of the scribes reasoned in their hearts, saying, ``Why does this Man speak blasphemies like these?" And Christ perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus (vs. 6-8). He knew what was concealed in their hearts, for He knows our secrets and all that goes on inside us. If you are afraid, He knows and He wants to give you peace. If you are not sure about His love, He assures you of it. If you are a sinner, He reveals your sin to heal it completely as a surgeon cuts open a contaminated place to remove it, so as to restore health. He knows and reveals, because He wants to cure and heal.

2. Christ teaches:

He knew the thought of the scribes. They knew the letter of the Law without understanding its spirit, therefore they did not apply it. In the situation of healing the paralytic, He could have settled for silencing their inner questioning by performing the miracle. But as a great teacher He wanted to explain to them the spirit of the Law. Christ did not perform a miracle to defend Himself or to silence His opponents, but because He loved mankind. He asked them, ``Which is easier, forgiveness of sin, or healing paralysis?" The two are important, yet speaking in front of people about forgiving sins is easy, since none can see whether the sin has really been blotted out from the records of heaven or still remains. But healing sickness is difficult before man, since it requires an instant visible proof. Then Christ taught them that He possessed both things, and healed the paralytic and forgave his sins.

3. Christ loves:

He saw criticism in the hearts of the scribes for Him. He explained to them what was difficult, and did not let their criticism of Him hinder His love that clarifies the truth and explains the difficult. He sat in Peter's house and allowed the public to surround Him at all times, to the extent that He had no time for rest or eating. And when the dust from the roof of the house fell on Him when the carriers removed the roof, He received the matter with love and compassion, answering the request of the four men who carried the paralytic to Him. Christ's giving, to both body and soul, was without limit. This giving cost Him power (virtue) that proceeded from Him to heal, and a work of redemption that makes atonement for the sins of sinners.

4. Christ the One who has the authority:

Christ said, ``All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). This miracle shows us His authority over sickness and sin.

The apostle Paul said that Christ did not consider it robbery to be equal with the Father (Philippians 2:6). This means that when Christ equalled Himself with the Father, He was not robbing something that was not His due; for it was His natural right. He is the One who has the authority over the Book of Life to write the name of the healed paralytic in it. He is also the One who has the authority over the human body to bring to the paralytic his complete health. They thought He was blaspheming, while He was in fact practising His natural right.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank You that in Christ we ®nd our perfect salvation, healing of our maladies and forgiveness for our sins. W us the blessings of your rich grace, so that we might advance by virtue of Your gifts from the sign of our

sickness to the proof of our healing, and from the symptoms of our anxiety to the proof of our security because You touched our lives. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Peter's house become a place of public service for the whole town?
2. What was the price that Peter paid to follow Christ?
3. What was the reward that Peter got when he gave his house to Christ?
4. Write four qualities of the four men who carried the paralytic.
5. Explain how the four men co-operated, and what is the lesson that we learn from them?
6. What was Christ's attitude towards the scribes who criticised Him?
7. Christ's authority was manifested in different domains what were they?

THE SEVENTH MIRACLE
HEALING THE SICK MAN
AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

¹ Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water, then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" ⁷ "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." ⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath. ¹⁰ And so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." ¹¹ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" ¹² So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" ¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." ¹⁸ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking

the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:1-18).

This is the miracle of healing a man who had been sick for 38 years, whom Christ healed at the pool of Bethesda on a feast day, when this man was not looking forward to a feast. Thirty-eight years of different feasts had gone by, but he hadn't been able to celebrate a single one. He was in continuous gloom. But that feast day when Christ met him became THE feast for him! Maybe many feasts have gone by without really being feasts for us because Christ did not possess our lives completely. But if we surrender our life to Him today, heart, mind and body, it will be a true feast day for us!

That day was one of the Jewish feasts. Therefore, Christ went up to Jerusalem, entering the city through the Sheep Gate, through which the sacrificial lambs were brought into the Temple. Then Jesus turned towards the pool of Bethesda which means ``the house of mercy'', and there He offered mercy to the wretched sick.

Christ is our passover who was sacrificed for us. He entered through the Sheep Gate on His way to the ``house of mercy''. Isn't this the divine mercy, that our Saviour came to us born in a manger, the cross awaiting Him and then the resurrection, in order that He might grant us His mercy of saving forgiveness?

John the evangelist explains the specifics of the pool. There was water in it, perhaps mineral water. From time to time it would become agitated. The Jews claimed that the agitation was caused by an angel coming to stir the water. They wouldn't say that they saw the angel. They were just expressing their belief. And the sick person who got into the pool first would be healed.

This miracle would repeat itself as a proof of two things: That God loved His people, and that He still performed miracles. A great number of sick people gathered there: the blind, the lame, the

ones with withered limbs, to stay in five colonnades facing the pool. There they would be protected from rain and sun and wind while their eyes were fixed on the water to see when it would stir.

In that place called "the house of mercy" mercy was lacking! For whenever the water would stir, everyone would thrust himself forward to be first or thrust someone from his family in first. No one was thinking of others, because it was assumed that if anyone did, he would lose his chance!

For that reason, this sick person had stayed there for 38 years without being made well. The feast came when Christ came to him saying: "Do you want to be made well?" He answered: "I have no man to put me into the water when it is stirred up." Then Jesus said: "Rise, take up your bed and walk." Immediately he got up, took his bed, folded the mattress on his shoulder and walked away.

That day was a Sabbath. The religious Jewish leaders were strictly observant of the demands of the religious law, which said among other things that no one could carry anything on a Sabbath. Therefore they rebuked the sick man who had been healed and criticised Christ, wanting to kill Him because He had broken the Sabbath.

Now let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The Jews and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

For 38 years this sick man had crawled as fast as he could towards the pool every time the water had stirred, but he always got there too late. Hundreds of people had arrived at the pool one after the other. Some went into the water and came out healed and went home. Others, not having been able to get in, died and were

buried. He, however, remained there, suspended between life and death of the living dead! He was neither resting with those who had died, nor was he rejoicing with those who had been healed. He certainly saw how egotistic mankind is. Probably many had pushed him aside tens of times in order to take his place and get into the pool before him. The healthy didn't have mercy on him and neither did the sick.

No healing!

No friend!

And above all: no hope, even though healing was so close to him!

Many times we come across similar situations: Someone else benefits while we don't. Someone else gets the chance and we don't. Someone else finds someone to give him a push and we don't. ``Whenever I come, someone else comes before me."

But the situation changes completely when the meeting with Jesus takes place and He asks: ``Do you want to be made well?"

People take issue with this question, asking: ``But why would the man be there at the pool of Bethesda if not to be healed?" However, the fact is that many get used to sickness and others caring for them, and they enjoy being the focus of attention. True, sickness is painful and depressing, but there can also be in it an abandon and indifference because the family will always care for the sick. This sick person whom his family had left, no doubt found help from the other sick people or their visiting relatives, at least from the sick ones who were better off than he. These would give him something to eat and drink because they knew that no one else would care for him. Now, if he were to be healed, he would have to bear responsibility for himself again. Was he ready to do that? That's why the Lord asked, ``Do you want to be made well?" He wanted to know whether he was ready to rely on himself and really wanted to change his condition.

God gives us a blessing only if we are hungry for it. ``Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). The Lord fills us when we are hungry and feel it and consequently ask. Someone who receives a blessing he didn't ask for doesn't fully enjoy it. But the blessing which we get after we have longed and asked persistently for, is more valuable to us.

The sick man answered: ``I don't have any man." Years of being ill had made him oblivious of anything but man. He didn't remember God, only men. He didn't remember the possibility that a miracle could happen, whereas he did remember the continuous disappointment. He could no longer see the divine love, for he only mentioned that he had no human being to help him get into the pool when the water was stirred up. It was Christ who lifted the sick man's eyes from man to God, so that he might say with his forefather David: ``I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

1. A command to get up:

This sick man met with a very strange command: ``Get up... take... walk." How could he take something and walk when he couldn't get up in the first place? If he had been able to get up he would have done so long ago!

The command asked two things of the sick man: Faith and obedience. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). The sick man believed while not yet seeing any healing or change in the muscles of his body. While nothing new had yet happened with his health condition, he saw the things to come! This is faith and confidence in the Word. Who gave this man this confidence? It was the Holy Spirit who opened his eyes. This explains the lack of response from many to the Word of the Lord, because the Word has not been allowed to interact with faith within them.

Do you remember the robber who repented because he saw what those standing around him couldn't see? He saw a Lord and a kingdom (Luke 23:42), while all the evidence pointed to Christ as being merely a crucified slave. But his eye of faith saw a Lord of a kingdom. May God give us eyes of faith so that we may see Christ the Lord, the holder of authority in heaven and on earth! May we see that those who are for us are more than those who are against us and that God is always present with His divine care for us, even though all external circumstances might seem to contradict this.

True faith always produces obedience, and makes man follow Christ wherever He goes, because all trust has been put in the Lord. When the sick man's faith responded with obedience, his body responded to Christ's command, so he was healed and took his bed and walked away.

2. A command to take the bed and walk:

This was a proof seen by all the bystanders that he had actually obtained healing. How many are those who doubt even though they have seen! Christ wants all the spiritually blind to have their eyes opened so that they may see that "the acceptable year of the Lord" has in fact come (Luke 4:19). It was the year of setting prisoners free.

3. After the sick man had been healed, he went to the temple (vs. 14):

No doubt he wanted to thank God. He didn't know who had healed him, because Christ had disappeared in the crowd. Christ was probably alone without any of His disciples, or else the sick man would certainly have recognised Him! In the temple, Christ met him again.

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1). That is why we always go to the house of the Lord to give thanks, to meet the Saviour again, in order that He may bless our lives more deeply. So let us return again saying:

“You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord... in the courts of the Lord's house” (Psalm 116:16-19).

II. THE JEWS AND THE MIRACLE

1. The letter before the spirit:

The day was a Sabbath, and the commandment says: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11). The elders of the Jews reproached the man who was healed, because he broke the commandment and carried his mattress on the Sabbath. The man answered, “He who made me well said to me: ‘Take up your bed and walk.’” And when they asked him who had made him well, he didn't know!

The Jewish elders were preoccupied with the Law, the sacrifices, the offerings and the rituals. They didn't grasp the spirit of the Law. They were concerned with its letter only, so they gave the Law greater importance and priority than mercy! It didn't matter to them that the sick man had been healed. They ought to have congratulated him first with the blessing of health that Heaven had granted him on the feast day, but they reproached him, forgetting the verse that says: “You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them: you shall surely help him lift them up again” (Deuteronomy 22:4). It is beyond question that the friends will gather to assist the owner of the donkey, lending him a helping hand because he will not be able to get it up by himself. But the Jewish elders stuck to

part of the Law only, disregarding the other part, whereas the Lord wants us to study the word in its entirety, as it is ``a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

2. God is continuously at work:

After they had berated the man they wanted to kill Jesus because He had broken the Sabbath commandment (vs. 15,16). Christ told them: ``My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (vs. 17). This word certainly provoked them again, because they could not comprehend that God, who ended creation on the sixth day, never stopped working for the salvation of mankind. He created the stars and kept them in their place: ``All things exist and were created by His will" (Revelation 4:11). The Sabbath day wasn't the end of God's work, because He still keeps the celestial spheres and the stars in their orbits! And Christ still repairs and heals people's bodies. True, the Sabbath was the end of the work of creation, but it was not the end of the work of providence and caring.

This verse fills our heart with joy, because our God continually works with us: ``Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1). ``He who keeps you will not slumber" (Psalm 121:4). For He gives and blesses and showers us always with fatherly love that never ends.

The Jewish elders were angry because they understood the meaning of the word ``my Father" (vs. 17). Christ equalled himself to God. ``Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him... because He said that God was His Father, making himself equal with God" (vs. 18). He Himself said: ``I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). To Philip He said: ``He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The apostle Paul says that Christ, being equal to God, did not claim a right He was not entitled to, but

rather He revealed a truth about His own character (Philippians 2:6). So why do people hate the truth?

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

``When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, `Do you want to be made well?'" (vs. 6). Let us consider what Christ did: He saw. He knew. He asked. He revealed His love. He commanded and He made the man repent.

1. Christ saw:

He saw the sick man who had no friend. He saw what people would consider a completely hopeless ``case". But He saw it with the opposite of human logic. Usually a physician will take care of the person whose condition is better first, because the physician's ability is limited. As for Christ, everything is possible for Him, and He specialises in the impossible.

2. Christ knew:

When the Lord sees us, He knows everything about us. He knows our weakness and our real need, and gives what we need generously and without reproach.

3. Christ asked:

``Do you want to be made well?" This is Christ's caring, always asking about us and our needs. Attaining Jesus' grace depends on us: Do we want?

4. Christ revealed His love:

He revealed it towards the man who had given up hope in any thing and any person! ``... He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities..." (Micah 7:18,19).

5. Christ commanded:

``Rise, take your bed and walk" is a command that contradicts

ordinary custom and expectations. It contradicts the true state of the human body because the body needs healing and recovery, but the Lord ignores that completely.

Sometimes we want to be spiritually at peace with ourselves trusting in ourselves, but the Lord gives a new birth: ``Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation..." (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is a complete change, for what human reason cannot believe, the almighty, divine love of the One who performs miracles accomplished.

6. Christ ordered him to repent:

``See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (vs. 14). It appears that the illness of this man was a result of sin, even though not all illness is a result of sin. Christ said about the man born blind: ``Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9:3). So the repentance of the sick man here is a condition for staying healthy. To start sinning again would be worse, because that would exclude him from his new life and kill it (1 Corinthians 11:30).

From Christ's command to the sick man who was healed we learn three truths:

- a) Illness may come as a result of sin.
- b) Repentance is a condition for staying healthy.
- c) Returning to sin results in a worse condition.

7. Christ revealed His deity:

Christ said that God was His Father (vs. 17). He made Himself equal to God (vs. 18). At that time He revealed His deity many times:

- a. He said that He performs the work of the Father: ``Whatever He (the Father) does, the Son also does in like manner" (vs. 19).

b. He said that He knows the Father's mind: ``For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does" (vs. 20).

c. He said that He gives life to the dead: ``For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will" (vs. 21,24-26).

d. He said that He judges the world: ``For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (vs. 22).

e. He said that He receives honour: ``that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him" (vs. 23).

f. He said that the Father bears witness of Him: ``If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true... The Father Himself who sent Me has testified to me." (vs. 31,32,37).

g. He said that John the Baptist bore witness of Him: ``You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth" (vs. 33).

h. He said that His works bore witness of Him: ``But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish the very works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me" (vs. 36).

i. The Holy Scriptures bore witness of Him: ``You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (vs. 39).

This is our almighty God, the mighty Saviour, who delivers us from our weaknesses and is compassionate and merciful towards us. So let us always bow down before Him to ask Him to give our lives a manifold blessing.

PRAYER

O powerful Jesus! You speak and it is, command and it comes into being. I thank You, praise you and acclaim You. You deserve my submission, surrender and obedience. You are the One I can depend on and the source of my help.

Grant us to rest our weary heads on your loving bosom, so that we may get what we need today and tomorrow until we are carried to Your presence, where there is neither sickness, need or groaning. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. When is our celebration of a feast true?
2. What is the symbolic meaning of Christ entering through the Sheep Gate and going to Bethesda?
3. Why did the Jewish elders rebuke the sick man for carrying his bed?
4. What was the problem of the man who had been sick for 38 years, and how did Christ solve it?
5. Christ commanded the sick man to rise, take his mattress and walk. This requires two things of the sick man. What are they?
6. Why did the sick man go to the Temple after having been healed?
7. At the time of this miracle Christ revealed His deity many times. Mention them.

THE EIGHTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE MAN WITH A WITHERED HAND

¹Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. ²Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, ``Stand up in front of everyone." ⁴Then Jesus asked them, ``Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. ⁵He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ``Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored (Mark 3:1-5, see also Matthew 12:9-14 and Luke 6:6-11).

New Testament commentators have differed on the chronological order of the miracles because the Gospel writers did not record Christ's miracles according to when they happened, but only chose some examples. Naturally, the commentators seek to establish a chronological order of the miracles. Thus, this miracle may be the eighth in the series of Christ's miracles.

Luke the Evangelist says that it was the man's right hand which was withered. The Evangelists agree that the miracle happened in the synagogue on a Sabbath after a discussion between Christ and the Jewish elders. This discussion arose because the disciples plucked ears of grain on the Sabbath. The elders rebuked them, not because they were plucking ears of grain. Moses' law allowed for any traveller to take what he could eat from the fields or the gardens on the condition that he does not take anything with him (Deuteronomy 23:25). The elders' rebuke was because the disciples plucked ears of grain on a Sabbath. Anyone who would gather a grain of seed would, in their view, be

undertaking work involving harvesting, threshing, winnowing and grinding before eating!

That's how the Jewish elders understood the attitude of the disciples, for they told Christ: ``Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" Christ reacted to them with four answers which we will consider while discussing the attitude of the Jewish elders concerning the miracles.

Christ entered the synagogue after these four comments, where He saw the man with the withered hand. According to Matthew, the Jewish elders asked Him: ``Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" They wanted thereby to add to the transgression of the disciples a transgression made by Christ Himself so that it might be an accusation against Him. Matthew says: ``... that they might accuse Him." Christ explained the spirit of the law to them and said to the man, ``Stretch out your hand", which, when he did, was restored as whole as the other.

Let us consider in this miracle:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The witnesses and the miracle
3. The Lord Jesus and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

It was the sick man's right hand that was withered, the hand he works with, the one he stretches out for greeting, the one that gives and receives.

1. The healing of this withered hand teaches us that the Lord wants to heal us from being unable to do good works:

Christ restores in us the ability to do good. The person who is far from the Lord is unable to do good works, but the Lord wants to urge us to do good works.

We read in Matthew 21 about the father who had two sons. He

said to the first one: "Son, go, work today in my vineyard." He answered, "I will not", but afterward he regretted it and went. The father said to the second son: "Son, go, work today in my vineyard." He seemed to obey by his words, but he didn't carry out the work. We are confronted with the same command. The Lord wants us to work in His vineyard because we are His children. He expects us to work in His vineyard. The man with the withered hand, however, was unable to work. Therefore, Christ told Him: "Stretch out your hand come on, work with me!"

2. The man with the withered hand was also unable to greet people:

His hand couldn't move. Our world is full of people with a right hand which is withered morally, spiritually and mentally. They don't stretch out their hand in love because they themselves are in need of love. They have never experienced it, so they cannot give it. We also need to learn that God loves us and that He is the Good Shepherd, Who stretches His hand out continually with the love which reaches us wherever and whoever we are. God's hand is always stretched out for reconciliation. He stretches out His hand to us in His love in order to reconcile us to Himself. He wants us in turn to be messengers of reconciliation who will reconcile people to God. He says: "Believer, stretch out your hand in order to reconcile people to God!" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

3. The withered hand cannot give:

We are by nature self-centred. Consider our loving God Who makes His sun rise over everybody and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45). We should behave like Him. Maybe we have not been used to that. Maybe we did good once and received bad in return so we have begun to fear doing good. We became prisoners of the past and slaves of bad experiences. We must move from the past into a better present and into a future which is bound to be even better with Christ.

This is how the apostle Paul speaks about the new life and the change which the Lord brings about in the soul: ``Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28).

The Lord also says: ``You have robbed me! But you say, `In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings..." (Malachi 3:8). Because you didn't present your tithes to the Lord. We need healing for our withered right hand, which doesn't give. Let us, then, learn how to give priority to the needs of others.

4. The withered hand cannot be stretched out to receive:

People hear about God's salvation, but they refuse it because they feel that they are better than others, or because they don't see their need for it, or because they despair too much about the evil they have done to be able to believe that God will accept them and grant them salvation. Whatever the reasons are, the sinful soul which is far from the Lord cannot stretch out the hand of faith in order to receive the blessing. We need the miracle of the healing of our withered hands so that they can be stretched out in confidence and faith in order to receive.

5. A congenital defect or one of negligence:

The hand withered because life does not pervade it, perhaps because of some congenital defect, or because it stopped working. Both these reasons are to be found in us in a spiritual sense. As for the congenital defect the Psalmist says, ``Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). Paul says, ``Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). We are sinners by our nature and by our actions. And Christ is the healer of both.

6. The command requires the following from the sick man:

a. Faith: Christ said to this sick man: "Stretch out your hand," and he stretched it out knowing that it was withered and had never moved before. He could have said: "I cannot, I am disabled." But because he believed in the Word, he stretched out his hand even though it was still withered, having full confidence in the command of the Lord.

b. Obedience: When there is sincere faith there is obedience. But faith which does not obey is the faith of the mind which has not changed the life. It is rather like the faith of the demons (James 2:19). True faith, on the other hand, is combined with obedience.

c. Courage: Many of the Jewish elders were standing there watching Christ closely. They asked Him, "Is it lawful to heal on a Sabbath?" in order to accuse Him. It was possible that the sick man would prefer his hand to remain withered rather than getting into trouble with the religious and political leaders! But, beside his faith and obedience, he had courage which made him follow Christ and carry out His orders.

May God give us strong faith and obedience that our faith might be effective and fruitful. May He give us courage to obey Christ and carry out His orders, because they are the best thing for our life.

II. THE WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

There are people, like the Jewish elders, who care about the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. They are slaves, not masters, for the law creates slaves, whereas grace creates masters. Under the law man fears, whereas he is at peace under grace. This is because the Lord gives freedom, rest and love. Therefore following Christ must be done with one's whole heart and mind. Then they come to enjoy the grace of Christ's setting

them free. ``For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Christ had already given a fourfold answer to the question of the Jewish elders: ``Is it lawful to heal on a Sabbath?"

1. He said that need allowed David to do something otherwise forbidden:

``Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: How he entered the house of God and ate the show bread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?" (Matthew 12:3,4). Here, Christ is referring to the story of David in 1 Samuel 21:3-6. The text of the law of Moses is found in Leviticus 24:5-9. From this we can see that the priest gave David the bread, contrary to the commandment of the law, because need allowed what was otherwise forbidden.

2. Then Christ said that it was not the letter of the law which was its intention, but the spirit of the law:

``The priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless" (Matthew 12:5). The priests break the law on the Sabbath, since the priest sacrifices every Sabbath day ``two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering, beside the regular burnt offering with its drink offering" (Numbers 28:9,10).

3. Christ said that His presence with His disciples, and in His disciples, is greater than the temple:

``I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple" (Matthew 12:6). He is speaking about Himself being the Temple because He is filled with the Holy Spirit, guided by Him in order to teach His teachings: ``The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me" (Luke 4:18).

4. Christ said that He had authority over the Law:

``For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8). For Christ came as a law giver: ``You have heard that it was said... But I say..." (Matthew 5:21,27,33). Here, we notice the might and the authority of Christ. Certainly, Moses received the law from God, but Christ always said, ``Verily, I say unto you," for Christ is the message and the messenger, the Word and the One Who speaks the Word. He is the One Who is unique among all those who came before Him, and no person can possibly challenge His position. For it is agreed that ``great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).

After this, Christ asked the Jewish elders: ``What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:11,12). From this interpretation we see Christ as the One Who gives the new law which perfects the old one.

The Jewish elders were not happy because they were under the bondage of the letter of the law. But the common people were tremendously happy because Christ preached freedom to them. ``Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). The people want the spirit of the law. The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath. For the Lord did not give us His laws in order to enslave us, but in order to serve us.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ is concerned about the essential:

He wants us to be concerned about the spirit of the law. He looks at the heart, not at the outward appearance. In Him the saying is fulfilled: ``Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). It is the beauty of our life as

believers in Christ that we are concerned about the spirit of the law. ``For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

We see the concern for the essential in the fact that Christ is the incarnate love. His law is the law of love. He inspires us to say, ``Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). True Christians say, ``My achievements, however great they may be, and my words, however eloquent and fascinating they may be, without love, they are but empty sounds without any value!"

2. Christ as the One W

He never hesitates in that, no matter if there are people who oppose Him or who love Him. His readiness to do good springs from the fact that He is love. The Lord always does the work of love. We shall never have to go through life's circumstances, harsh or sweet as they may be, without experiencing God the merciful and His deep, perfect love for us.

3. Christ the man:

Jesus asked: ``Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" They kept silent. ``So when He had looked around at them with anger, [He was] grieved by the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). Christ in His humanity expressed His emotions. They showed on His face.

When a deaf and dumb person was brought to Christ, ``looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him... `be opened'" (Mark 7:34). Christ sighed over the sufferings of mankind. A rich young man asked Christ about eternal life. Christ looked at him, loved him and said: ``One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark

10:21). Here we see Christ's emotions: grief at the hardness of the hearts and love for those in need.

4. Christ as the One who is able to do the impossible:
When a problem seems impossible to solve and a dilemma impossible to get out of, we find Christ to be a specialist in doing the impossible. The withered hand was a problem which was impossible to solve, but the almighty Solver of problems solved it! He is always telling you: Stretch out the hand of faith and receive a greater blessing. ``Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for Jesus who fulfilled the law and explained to us the spirit thereof, declaring to us the love that pities the sinner by granting him forgiveness, and shows mercy on the sick by granting him health. He gave immeasurably and indiscriminately, far above all expectation and desire.

Help me see Christ dealing with me today as He dealt with the one with the withered hand. He is still on our earth by His Holy Spirit, doing far above what we desire or expect. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the Jewish elders rebuke Christ's disciples?
2. Explain the spiritual meanings of the fact that the withered hand cannot work, cannot be extended to greet, cannot give and cannot receive.
3. What does God mean in saying: ``You have robbed me" (Malachi 3:8)?
4. Jesus ordered the sick man, ``Stretch out your hand." This needed courage. How did the sick man show it?
5. From this miracle, prove that Jesus was a law maker.

6. Jesus gave concern to the essential. How did He show this in this miracle?
7. In this miracle we see the humanity of Christ. Explain this.

THE NINTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

¹ When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, ``This man deserves to have you do this. ⁵ Because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: ``Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, `Go,' and he goes; and that one, `Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, `Do this,' and he does it." ⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, ``I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well (Luke 7:1-10, see also Matthew 8:5-13).

Matthew says that the centurion went up to Christ asking Him to heal his servant, whereas Luke says that the centurion sent the Jewish elders to Christ in order to ask Him to do it. However, there is no contradiction between the two accounts, for the Jewish leaders represented the centurion before Christ. They told Christ about him: ``He loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." This does not mean, of course, that the centurion had literally built it with his own hands, but that the builders and the carpenters represented him in doing this. One may say that he built it ``without his hands"! In the same way, the centurion came to

Christ, without being literally present. The Jewish elders represented him.

The evangelist Matthew gives a perfect description of the condition of the sick servant saying: "[He] is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented;" whereas Luke says: "A certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die."

In this chapter, Christ's person draws us in a special way, for He is the living Saviour, who performed the miracle then, and Who still continues to perform miracles even today, since He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The centurion in this miracle account draws our attention by his morals, humility and faith. We pray that God will make us loving, humble and faithful like the centurion, so that we may be able to obtain blessing from the Lord for us, our homes and our people.

This centurion reminds us of another virtuous centurion, namely Cornelius (Acts 10). He had been an idol-worshipper in accordance with the religion he had been born into. However, he had not found satisfaction in it, and had started to search for the truth, exactly as the Ethiopian finance minister had done (Acts 8), and also Lydia the seller of purple from Thyatira, who was worshipping God, wanting to draw nearer to the Lord. She consequently came to know Christ the Saviour (Acts 16).

John the evangelist says that Christ came to gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad (John 11:52). He came to attract the centurion who had come from Italy, in order to bring him close to the Lord and into the fold, making him one with Himself. We don't know the nationality of that sick servant who was on the verge of death and whom Christ healed. We don't know from where He was abducted or taken captive to be sold to the centurion in Capernaum. But Christ has come to break down the middle wall of division (the enmity) between humanity, in order to

gather the children of God of different nationalities into one (Ephesians 2:14). How beautiful are His words: "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). We thank God for all those who come to Christ from every fold or background to discover and to know the living, blessed Saviour.

And now let us consider:

1. The ones in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The sick servant:

He is in fact the one who is in need of this miracle, but he was unable to come to Christ because he was paralyzed.

His condition did not allow for him to be carried to Christ. He was in a most painful and tormenting situation. However, the centurion took his problem upon himself and went to be his spokesman before Christ (through the Jewish elders). Here we see a person unable to help himself, who is served by another unable person, viz. the centurion, who asks other unable people to lead him to the Almighty, the One Who is able to do everything!

We find many people in our society who resemble that unable person. They need Christ, but they don't see this need because they are paralyzed by sin. These people need someone to be their spokesman before Christ. May the Lord give us grace to take upon ourselves the problems of many who are far from the Lord. Let us love them and pray for them, hoping that God will deal with their souls to heal them from the sickness of their sin.

2. The centurion:

a. He is the loving man: The servant was "dear to him" (vs. 2). At

that time, servants were bought for money. He was treated as a thing, not a person. The death of a servant was nothing but a material loss. But the centurion valued his servant differently from his contemporaries. He saw him as a person and a dear one. The centurion was also so loving towards all the nationals that the Jews said about him: ``He loves our people" (vs. 5). His love was not merely words nor emotional affection, but actions, because he built a synagogue for them to worship in. According to his job, the centurion was specialised in killing, war and bloodshed. The Jewish community was very subversive and disobedient, so the Roman soldiers who came to Capernaum went to the extremes of ferocity and violence in order to suppress their many revolts. This centurion must have reached his high rank because he was strong and able to suppress revolts. In spite of that we see his great love and gentleness. The nature of his job did not influence him, nor was he affected by his society. On the contrary: he was the one who affected his society, wielding an influence on his environment, which had no influence on him! He was the strong personality in his job. Many excuse their wrongdoings by their position which forces them to do wrong, but this centurion was fantastic in forcing goodness and love on his position. This teaches us a lot about our ability to live out our faith and principles without regard to the adverse atmosphere surrounding us.

The servant of the centurion must have been faithful and sincere to his master. Let us keep in mind that we are the Lord's servants, for we are His creatures and His love has captured us. We are His beloved ones, so we must be faithful to Him. Let us listen to His sweet word: ``Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:23). We do not need to wait for the end of our earthly life in order to enter into the joy of our Lord, for we can enter into His joy here and now,

because we enter into His presence in serving, obeying and loving Him.

b. He is the humble man: The Jewish elder said, ``He is worthy of this being done for him" (vs. 4), whereas he said about himself: ``I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You" (vs. 6,7). He sees how unworthy he is both in his house and his person. St. Augustine said: ``The centurion's sense that he was unworthy of Christ entering his house made him worthy of Christ entering his heart."

Christ entered many proud people's houses. But they didn't receive any blessing because He didn't enter their hearts. As for the centurion, Christ didn't enter his house, but He entered his heart and satisfied his need. The humble person is the one who describes and values himself correctly. The centurion said to the Lord Jesus: ``I do not think myself worthy that You should enter my house, but say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority" (vs. 8). ``Under authority" means that he has a certain rank with soldiers under his command. At the same time, however, he was under the authority of others. So the believer is the one who does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think (Romans 12:3), nor considers himself too good. He values himself correctly and judiciously, as God has apportioned a measure of faith to everyone. The humble person knows his true value, his strength and weakness, his potential and inability. When we value ourselves correctly we will be humble.

A certain student once went on a summer holiday from Cairo to the countryside in order to visit his grandfather who was a farmer. The boy walked in the middle of the wheat fields saying: ``Look, grandfather, the stalks of wheat over there, standing tall and upright! How strong they are! But these stalks are bowed. They

must be ashamed!" The grandfather corrected his grandson saying: ``The straight wheat stalks don't bear any grain, but the bent ones bear much grain. The empty ones lift their heads, whereas the full ones bow down." May our God give us the humility that bows down before Him and kneels before the Lord saying to Him: ``I don't consider myself worthy of coming to you, and I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof."

c. He is the believing man: He said, ``Just say a word, and my servant will be healed." This military man, who was used to giving orders and always have them executed, knew that all authority in heaven and on earth was given to Christ, so he believed in the power of His word. He put himself in the place of the lowest addressing the highest, and he took that which was impossible to perform to the One Who is able to perform it. In the Son of Mary, the Carpenter of Nazareth, the centurion saw the Performer of Miracles and the Holder of Authority, whose word could travel and extend to where the sick servant lay ready to die.

The centurion didn't ask for any sign from Christ that his servant had been healed, but believed that Christ's word makes the miracle happen. And it did! Christ honoured and praised his faith saying, ``I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" The object of great faith is great, so the object of our faith is what matters. The centurion could have put his faith in a human physician who was unable to heal his servant. He could have taken him to one of the Jewish elders in order to have him pray for him without any healing taking place. But when he put his faith in the One who is worthy of faith, healing did take place. We say that prayers solve problems, but in fact they are only means which bring us in contact with the true Problem-Solver, who is worthy of our trust in Him.

Once Napoleon was reviewing his troops when the reins of his horse fell down and the horse ran. A soldier came forth

courageously, stopped it and gave the reins back to the emperor, who said to him, ``Thank you, Commander. I am indebted to you." Quickly the soldier responded, asking, ``Commander of which division, my Lord?" Napoleon was astonished at him and said, ``The division of my private guard." Then the soldier threw down his gun and said, ``Let whoever wants it take it!" And he went away to take command of the division of Napoleon's private guard because he had believed the word of the emperor!

The centurion's faith was great because he believed that his servant would be healed instantly and not gradually. We see how great his faith is compared with that of the Jews for there was no faith in Israel like his.

II. THE JEWISH ELDERS AND THE MIRACLE

All the attention of the Jewish elders was centred on the centurion. Neither the sick servant nor the Lord Jesus meant anything to them. They said: ``He is worthy that this be done for him, for he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue." Many look only at the surface and don't penetrate to the depth. These elders retired from the scene after they had presented the centurion's request, because they were performing a duty owed to the centurion. They behaved like their colleagues whom Herod asked about the birthplace of Christ. They answered, ``In Bethlehem in Judaea" (Matthew 2:5). None of them, however, set out to nearby Bethlehem in order to see that newborn child, about whom they had memorised all the prophecies. The superficial way of thinking gets no blessing. They did not criticise Jesus for this miracle, but they were only on-lookers conveying the centurion's request. Their part ended by bringing the unable person in touch with the able. They didn't derive any benefit. They were only an ``assisting factor, a catalyst" in the healing of the servant.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ's humility:

Christ told the centurion: ``I will come and heal him" (Matthew 8:7). The centurion's request made through the Jewish elders was received graciously and lovingly. Jesus was willing to go, and in fact He went: ``Then Jesus went with them" (Luke 7:6). How much we have experienced His coming to us!

There are two great comings of Christ. The first was when He came to us in the manger, and we all await His second coming. But between these two great comings Christ comes to the faithful thousands of times: In the office He comes in order to help him solve a problem in his work. In his bed He comes to support him in facing illness. When he is lonely or feeling tense He comes to give him peace. When the waves of life are stirred up He comes to calm them. And at the time of laughter, He has already come, because He is the source of laughter and joy. He always comes and never tarries: It is impossible to ask for Him and not find Him, for when we ask we find, not only material things, but that which is more important: His sweet and gracious person.

2. Christ's speed:

``I will come and heal him" He doesn't make us wait! Even when He made the two sisters Mary and Martha wait and came after their brother Lazarus had died, it was only to give them a greater blessing than just the healing of an illness. He is not slow like people reckon, but He comes at the right time to be more gracious and give a greater blessing. Maybe we blame Him much, but His sweet words still comfort our hearts in His coming to us quickly.

3. Christ's power:

His word has authority. ``All things were made through Him" (John 1:3). He is the Maker of everything. He stretches out His hand directly to the place of weakness in order to heal it and treat it and solve the problem that makes you sleepless. Often we

diagnose our problems wrongly, but Christ diagnoses correctly and presents the correct cure with perfect love.

Christ came to save what was lost. He Himself made death die. Illness is the first symptom of death. Christ came to heal our illnesses and bear our afflictions. Our body is important to Him because it is the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells, and because He will raise it up on the last day.

4. Christ's warning:

“I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (vs. 9). These are words of praise for the centurion and reproach for His nation.

Whenever we look at a person who comes to Christ from another fold and who lives with the Lord and loves Him and sacrifices himself following in Christ's footsteps, we offer thanksgiving for this person. We wonder if those who come from this fold love Him and serve Him and sacrifice themselves for Him like those who come from another fold (John 10:16).

Let us submit ourselves to the Loving, Humble One, Who has all authority, so that He may change us from being takers into being servants, by strength of faith, love and humility.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, I thank You for Your great power and unlimited love that You bestow on me whenever I am in need. W
come in with Your grace to work the miracle that my words cannot describe, and my tongue is unable to thank You enough for. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you explain that which seems contradictory between

Matthew's and Luke's account in the centurion's request that Christ heal his servant?

2. How did Christ by this miracle gather the scattered children of God into one?
3. How do you take upon yourself the problem of a person who is unable to come to Christ?
4. How did the humility of the centurion become apparent?
5. How did the love of the centurion become apparent?
6. How do you see Christ's humility in this miracle?
7. In this miracle Christ gives us a warning which?

THE TENTH MIRACLE

RAISING THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN

¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ``Don't cry." ¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, ``Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. ``A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. ``God has come to help his people." ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judaea and the surrounding country (Luke 7:11-17).

How mighty is the love which extends to the most wretched people in the most despicable places in order to change deep grief into overwhelming joy! The humble village of Nain near Capernaum was given a place in history thanks to this miracle which took place there when Christ raised the dead young man, the only son of his widowed mother. Nain was situated near Shunem, where the prophet Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son by God's leave and power. This happened nine hundred years before the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (2 Kings 4). Christ raised the widow's son by the authority of His word, saying to him: ``Young man, I say to you, arise!"

Christ went into the village of Nain with a group of His followers at the same time as a funeral procession was on its way out of the gate. Then, all of a sudden, the Lord and Author of life was in direct confrontation with death. As if the devil was challenging Christ, saying: ``I have taken this young man as my prey. Who can save

him from my hands? Man must pay the wages of his sin. What can you possibly do? You yourself will fall into my hands and die and be buried in the grave!"

This confrontation reveals to us not only one miracle, namely the raising of the son of the widow from the dead, but the miracle of the whole life of Christ. For Christ who came to us as a man, born of a woman, under the law, lived among us and experienced everything which we have experienced (except sin). He died and was buried. However, He rose from the dead. His whole ministry consisted in raising the dead, whom sin had killed, and whose lives it had destroyed. He says: ``Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). When He raised Lazarus, He said: ``I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25,26). He said these words and proved them when He raised Lazarus. He also proved them when He rose from the dead. He says them today to every one of us. He proves them since He raises us from the death of sin, so that His saying is proven true: ``Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:24-27).

This is the first resurrection from the death of our sins: ``The hour is coming and now is" when the dead in sin hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it and open their ears and hearts to Him, will live, since the Lord performs the same miracle with them that He performed with the son of the widow in Nain, because Christ Has life in Himself. Another hour will come in the future, because He has been given authority to judge. ``The hour

is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29).

There was no one who had risen from the dead for nine hundred years (cf. 2 Kings 4). So why did Christ choose this widow to raise her son? Weren't there scores of young men who died on that day in Palestine?

To answer that, we say that we are ignorant of the secrets of divine grace, but whenever divine providence singles us out with a blessing, and God touches us personally in a way that distinguishes us from many around us, let us remember His kind saying: ``You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). Here we must raise a prayer of thanksgiving in all humility, because we have no right to anything at all. We only enjoy a grace bestowed on us by God out of His love.

So let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

The one in need was the mother who lost her son:

1. This woman was without hope:

Her husband is dead, and now her only son has died. The only son was the object of her love, her offspring and her provider. As a widow she had no hope at all for the future (according to the flesh). The first blow to her was the death of her husband. This was severe! Lo, the second blow, the death of her only son was deadly! She was plagued by tribulation and stricken with grief. God in His love understands what a blow such a severe tribulation can be to a

person, and He described her by saying: ``I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). This is a scriptural description of the psychological and emotional pain which that widow faced in the loss of her only son.

2. This woman had received the painful blow:

This was the severest of the results of sin. ``Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). That was a concentrated dose of grief that was presented in the cup of the widow of Nain. She saw the worst of sin's results twice.

3. She was suffering:

Sometimes the voice of our sufferings becomes louder than the voice of our prayers. And the Lord's heart moves with us in our grief, and He sees our tears and our broken souls and the grief which wrenches our hearts. We do not always know why He allows us to go through these experiences. Perhaps it is the wages of what we do or the evil result of the behaviour of others towards us. In all these circumstances, He stands with us because He knows the full extent of the pain, and also how limited our ability to bear it is. This is what the bystanders at the miracle felt, for they described what Christ had done to the grieving widow by saying: ``God has visited His people" (Luke 7:16). They meant that He came to visit us and inquire about us. We always discover that God does not leave us. He visits us, comes to us and stands beside us to relieve our pain and support us.

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. W

Let us try to imagine the situation: We see a mother crying behind a group carrying the coffin of her son, headed towards the

graveyard. Then we see another group of people entering the town with Christ in their midst. It would have been customary for the two groups to join and head towards the graveyard to express sympathy with the widow. But Christ stopped the procession! It would have been natural for the first group to hinder Him, so that they could pursue their way and complete their holy task of burying the dead. But the Bible tells us: ``Those who carried him stood still." It must have been the splendor of Christ's face and the tone of His voice and all the love and authority in it that made them pay attention.

Often, when we think we are fulfilling an important duty, Christ blocks our way with a word from the Gospel, or with a personal way of dealing with us, or with a spiritual touch, and stops us from whatever we are doing. As a result, our life takes a new and better direction. Therefore, we must have a sensitivity to the touch of His hand and the guidance of His word, so that we can change our direction according to His guidance, waiting for Him to tell us what it will be.

2. The pall-bearers glorified God:

When the dead man rose and spoke, Christ presented him to his mother, ``then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, `A great prophet has risen up among us;' and, `God has visited His people.'" They must have remembered Elisha when he raised the Shunammite woman's son, and they also must have remembered Elijah when he raised the widow's son from the dead. When they said that Christ was ``a great prophet", it showed that they had not discovered all the aspects of Christ's personality. For there is another dimension to Christ. It is true that He is a prophet. He called himself a prophet when He said: ``No prophet is accepted in his own country." But He is more than a prophet! He is the subject of prophecy. The prophecies had spoken about Him and testified of Him, so that He could say:

``You search the Scriptures... and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Then Christ is also the originator of prophecy. He prophesied about much which was fulfilled and much which will be fulfilled. He prophesied about His death on the cross when He said: ``The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise on the third day" (Mark 9:31). And it happened. Furthermore, we are still waiting for His prophecy about His second coming to be fulfilled.

Christ is working with His Spirit in us in order that we may discover the profoundest aspects of His personality so that we may understand that ``Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).

3. The bystanders said, ``God has visited His people": They meant that God had intervened divinely in their lives, as the Old Testament says about Naomi: ``Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). In Nain God visited His people for He gave them life.

It is beautiful that the bystanders understand that with Christ a spiritual revival had come to the world. In Him God had come close to mankind to visit and inquire about their needs. How many times has Christ visited us when we were sick in bed and healed us, when we were in difficulty and released us from our worries, when we were in fear and removed our fear. When He visits us with His peace we discover, many times, that we feared something which did not exist. Our fears were only within us and not from around us. The Lord Jesus has visited us in the moment of real and imagined danger. He always and forever visits us.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ, the One W

When He meets us and confronts us, our whole situation changes. When He met the widow who was weeping over the death of her son, she was changed into a happy mother because her son was restored to her. ``If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We all need His coming to us: ``Come into our midst, Stand with us, And make our hearts your dwelling-place" (Arabic religious song). So let us listen to His word: ```Comfort, yes comfort My people!' says your God. `Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1,2). May the words of the apostle Paul be accomplished in us: ``Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). He gives us living water, so from within us flows a river of living water. He gives us a personal consolation in order that we may console others.

This will also happen to us on the last day when we find ourselves in His presence. We will hear a mighty voice from heaven saying: ``Behold, the dwelling-place of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3,4). The former things pass away when He comes to visit His people.

2. Christ, the Compassionate One:

Sight says, ``Do not weep" when the problem has passed away; but faith says it while the problem is still there. Christ wants to enliven faith within us since, before we receive the blessing, He commands us not to weep because His rescue is on its way. The widow could not understand His wisdom, but she understood it afterwards. ``What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7).

Christ lays His hand on our shoulder in order to encourage us while we are surrounded by evil. The encouragement of His word is strong even though the circumstances contradict it totally. But we understand the meaning of His word and trust in it. At His word we ``throw the net" in full confidence.

Christ performed His miracles according to the request of the one in need, as when He healed the leper (Luke 5:12). He also performed miracles upon the request of someone acting on behalf of someone else, as when He healed the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1). He performed miracles according to His love, for the widow did not request anything. Nevertheless, He performed the miracle because He was motivated by His deep love (Luke 7:13).

Sometimes we are saved from trouble because we have prayed, and sometimes because someone else has prayed for us. Sometimes He hears our groan and sees our trouble, so He stretches out His compassionate hand to us because the heavenly eye is awake and open towards us.

3. Christ, the Strong One:

a. Christ commanded by His own authority: ``I say to you, arise," and He knows that the strength of His love never fails. ``In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4,5). He is the One Who brings the dead to life. He calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:17). Once

again, life penetrated the body of this young man, because Christ had brought it back from where it had gone to the body from which it had left. ``All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18); in heaven to where the soul had gone away, and on earth where the body lay in the coffin. Heaven gave the soul and earth received it in order that the son could return to his mother.

b. Elijah and Elisha gave themselves in their effort of praying for the resurrection of the dead by God's action. Gehazi failed in raising the son of the Shunammite woman. As for Christ, the Lord of life, He directly ordered life to return to the body of that young man. It did!

c. The Lord of glory and the One to Whom all authority is given raised three people from the dead. The first one was Jairus' daughter in the house, where He said: ``Little girl, I say to you, arise", and she arose. Some of us are like Jairus' daughter in that our sins are inward, unseen. Christ is ready to raise us from the death of our sins, even if they are hidden from people's eyes.

Then He raised the son of the widow at the gate of the town. Many of us have sins which are, so to speak, at the door, visible on our hands and audible on our tongues. Christ wants to raise us up even though our sins are obvious to everyone.

He raised Lazarus after he had been rotting in the tomb for four days. Many have remained in their sins for such a long time that they have rotted. Christ is ready to raise them from the perdition of death by His power in order to give them life.

No matter what the condition of our spiritual death is, Christ wants to raise us with Him and give us eternal life. So let us ask that from Him, because He is the Lord of life.

Even if He has already raised us, let us ask it for someone else's sake, who is dead in his sins, that the Lord may bring him to life.

Let us pray that His Church may live, enlightened by a light which enlightens all the world to the glory of His name, and that His kingdom may come.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, I thank You because Christ's mercy reached to the depth of my misery, and caught up with me in the abyss of my misfortune; and lifted me up and brought me hope; it touched me and brought courage into my soul. Open my heart to contain more of Your peace, and accept my entire life as I give it to you out of gratitude for Your favours. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare Elisha's raising of the Shunammite woman's son with Christ's raising of the son of the widow of Nain.
2. In John 5:24-29 Christ talked about an hour that "now is" and an hour which will come in the future. What will happen at those two hours?
3. Why did Christ choose the son of the widow, to raise him?
4. The blow that the widow had received was twofold how?
5. Why did those who carried the coffin stop when Christ commanded them to do so?
6. What does it mean that "God has visited His people"?
7. Mention an experience in your own life where God visited you.

THE ELEVENTH MIRACLE

CALMING THE STORM

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, ``Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ``Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" ³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ``Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, ``Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, ``Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:35-41, see also in Matthew 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25).

Christ stilled the storm which was raging across the Sea of Galilee. This sea also carries the names of Lake Tiberias and the Lake Gennesaret. This is a large, elliptical lake, approximately 20 kilometres long and 13 kilometres wide. The river Jordan flows into it, replenishing it with fresh water. Its eastern shore is rimmed by brown mountains with a height of up to 700 meters. To its north lie the Hermon heights with their snow-covered peaks. The town of Capernaum was situated on the western shore (towards the Mediterranean Sea). This town witnessed many of Christ's miracles.

Christ spent a long day preaching to the people on the western shore, towards Capernaum. The crowds thronged around Him from all sides, for He taught and healed many. When evening approached, He was tired. He ordered His disciples to cross the lake to its eastern shore, to the mountainous area in order to rest. The disciples dismissed the multitude and took Christ in a boat

accompanied by small boats carrying people who loved Christ or who still needed instruction or healing.

Everything was calm, but according to the nature of the Sea of Galilee sudden storms could come up, for it is over 200 meters below sea level. Therefore it is a very hot place prone to sudden storms. A mighty storm erupted, causing the waves to break across the boat and threatening to fill it.

Being from Capernaum, the crew of the boat were used to struggling with the lake. They must have seen many nights before with roaring waves and strong winds. This night, however, was the worst of all. They had never seen such rough weather. The small boats most probably turned back to Capernaum on the western shore at the beginning of the storm. Christ fell asleep in the boat while His disciples were carrying out His order to cross the lake in spite of the strong winds. They left their tired Teacher to sleep so that He might rest.

However, when the storm grew stronger than they could manoeuvre against, they remembered that their Teacher was with them in the boat. They awakened Him and said to Him reproachfully: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Because of their fear they spoke in the plural, including Christ with them in the danger of perishing. Christ rose, rebuked the winds, and it became calm.

Winds cause waves. When winds are stilled, waves calm down, too. When the waves calmed down, an opportunity presented itself for the disciples to learn a lesson in faith, for He asked them: "Why are you so fearful?" Certainly, the storm was stronger than any storm the disciples had experienced, but this time Christ was with them, so the situation was different. But because of their weak faith, they did not feel how strong His presence was. They were fearful. Their knowledge of Him was not yet complete. They needed to know Him better! Let us not rebuke them, for we are like

them. We may know Christ theologically and doctrinally, but not as Lord and as a personal Saviour.

This is life: a storm, followed by seeking refuge with Christ, followed by deliverance and peace. Then we learn a lesson which strengthens our faith in order that we may face the tribulations of the future with greater strength and faith. We hear it in the Book of Psalms: ``Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters. They see the works of the Lord, And His wonders in the deep. For He commands and raises the stormy wind, Which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens. They go down again to the depths; Their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end. Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, And He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, So that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; So He guides them to their desired haven. Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people, And praise Him in the assembly of the elders" (Psalm 107:23-32).

Now, let us consider:

1. The ones in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The ones in need were the disciples in the big boat headed eastward.
2. They were the people in the small boats accompanying the big boat, who returned westward when they saw the beginning of the storm.
3. Moreover, it appears to the observer that Christ Himself was included among those who needed a miracle, for He was sleeping

in the boat exposed to danger! How much we imagine that the Kingdom of God is in danger and shout, ``We are perishing!" forgetting that ``God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God shall help her, just at the break of dawn" (Psalm 46:5).

Let us note that the small boats had returned. Often people decide to follow Christ, but when it becomes stormy they turn back to the shore, thinking it safer, renouncing the shore towards which Christ's boat is heading, thinking that they will perish there because they are more concerned about their safety than about following Christ.

There are several kinds of storms we face:

1. The storm of fear:

How many storms rage in our lives! Life seems calm and then suddenly difficulties arise which upset and destroy our peace. Immediately, we must seek refuge with Christ, tell Him what we need and make Him confront our difficulty with us, committing ourselves and our problem to Him in order that we may rest assured, being in His hands, that He is the Powerful One, the Saviour, the Almighty. Let us commit our lives to Him, in order that He, rather than we, may confront our difficulty. Let us look towards the Good Shepherd, who rescues us from our fear and carries us on His shoulders and then arranges a feast. This is what happened with the disciples. Jesus confronted their difficulty and celebrated their rescue with them!

2. The storm of sadness:

Maybe someone who is dear to us dies and it appears that clouds have extinguished the stars! And those who fear and are anxious and sad without hope are right in a way. But why do those who do have hope confront their difficulties with anxiety as if their living Saviour, who shackled death and enlightened eternity did not exist? Despite their fears He will remain with them, enlightening

their life until He brings them to eternity, in order that they may ascertain that His promises are true.

3. The storm of anger:

It may be anger towards someone who has hurt us or lied about us, which makes us furious. In such situations, Christ stills this storm, telling us, ``Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

4. The storm of doubts:

Sometimes we ask Him: ``Do you not care?" This question expresses doubt in His love and in how highly He values us. We certainly do not deal with a Creator only, but with a Father. Let us address Him and speak to Him. This is the most beautiful thing which the disciples did, because they brought their complaints about Him to Him. They went to Him in order that He might save them from something He made! For He is the Master of the winds which raged on the waves. He gathers the winds into their storehouses, so that His waves calm down, and His children feel secure, and His perfect love drives out fear.

5. The storm of feeling guilty:

When we feel guilty Jesus gives us rest as He forgives our sins and reconciles us to God. So if the heart is heavy laden with concern for error, taking refuge with Him relieves us from sin and restores the relationship with God. The disciples had not known Christ before. When Christ made Himself known as the Son of Man, who would be delivered into the hands of the chief priests in order to be crucified and put to death, His disciples told Him: ``Far be it from you, Lord." They had not yet understood His message, and they needed more instruction. They needed first-hand knowledge ``That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). This is the knowledge of profound experience. ``Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Let us learn to know Him in the midst of the difficulties and troubles of life.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

We have seen Christ teach and walk, exhaust Himself and rest, get hungry and eat, be happy and weep, be crucified and die and then rise. Here we see Him asleep on the cushion in the boat, for He is fully man. However, if we stop at this point, we have only said half the truth. For this sleeping man is also the God with the authority over nature. He woke up to calm the winds and still the storm. ``Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). For Christ, fully man, is fully God, even though His body veiled His divinity so that only some people could see it. But His work revealed His everlasting power and His divinity, because He calmed the winds. Let us apply this fact, practically and experientially, being confident in Him, for He orders our present and our future according to His love.

We see in this miracle three truths about Christ:

1. Christ is not disturbed by our requests, but by our lack of faith:

How loving and tender He is! He did not rebuke the weak faith in the midst of the storm, but calmed the storm first and then rebuked. He wants us to request. Oh, that we might have such a trusting and confident faith!

2. W

Moses used the staff (Exodus 14:15,16,21,26). Elisha used Elijah's cloak (2 Kings 2:13,14). Christ, the Word of God, rebuked the winds and told the sea, ``Peace, be still!" The winds stopped at His command and there was calm.

3. Christ appears to be sleeping and unconcerned, but He is awake in order to rescue:

Maybe we complain about Him and to Him, but He does not do anything, which we can justly complain about.

Let us speak to the Lord and turn towards Him, cling to Him and remain in Him that we may find the blessing with Him.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, the sea of our lives is sometimes calm, and raging at other times. But in the midst of all these, we are more than conquerors by Him who loved with such a deep, fathomless love that exceeds the bottomless seas. All this is by virtue of You, for You loved us first, and in Your love we are secure, and on Your mercy we do rest and are at ease. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the three names of the Sea of Galilee?
2. Why did Christ ask the disciples to cross the lake?
3. What did the people in the small boats do?
4. When did Christ rebuke the weakness of the disciples' faith?
5. How does Christ still in us the storm of grief at the death of someone dear to us?
6. How does Christ still in us the storm of doubts?
7. How does Christ still in us the storm of guilt?

THE TWELFTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE MAN POSSESSED

BY THE DEMON CALLED ``LEGION''

¹ They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. ² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. ⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷ He shouted at the top of his voice, ``What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" ⁸ For Jesus had said to him, ``Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" ⁹ Then Jesus asked him, ``What is your name?" ``My name is Legion," he replied, ``for we are many." ¹⁰ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. ¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹² The demons begged Jesus, ``Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³ He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. ¹⁴ Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. ¹⁵ When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told about the pigs as well. ¹⁷ Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. ¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him, but said, ``Go home to

your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed (Mark 5:1-20, see also in Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39).

Christ healed the "legion" in the country of the Gergesenes, according to St. Matthew, and according to St. Mark and St. Luke in the country of the Gadarenes. This is not contradictory, for ten kilometres from the Sea of Galilee there were two large towns, Gadara and Gergesa. Some named the area after one of the towns, and some after the other. So the country may be called either that of the Gadarenes or that of the Gergesenes.

St. Matthew says that Christ healed two lunatics, while Mark and Luke say that He healed one. This is not contradictory, either, for Christ actually healed two, both of whom Matthew mentions, while Mark and Luke contented themselves with mentioning only the most prominent of the two. If Matthew had said that Christ healed two lunatics, and Mark and Luke that He healed one only, this would have been contradictory.

In this miracle we find the healing of a lunatic whom Christ brought back to sanity. The man was possessed by many demons, and then Christ came to possess his heart! When we read the Gospel we see God's work written in history. When the Holy Spirit works in us we see His work written in our hearts! In this miracle the holy Word presents to us Christ the Saviour, who reconciled the lunatic to his own self and to his community. When we encounter Christ and He encounters us, He changes our lives to the better and the higher. That which happened in history becomes a daily personal experience. How much we need to be reconciled by Him to ourselves and to our community!

So now let us consider:

1. The one in need and the miracle

2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED AND THE MIRACLE

1. Possessed by a division of demons:

The man who needed the miracle called himself "legion", which means a division or a battalion in the Roman army. It numbers up to six thousand soldiers. The same word is used in Ephesians 6:12, where it is translated "spiritual hosts of wickedness". This man was possessed by a whole division of demons. If he had been an ordinary lunatic, the swine would not have perished as a result of his healing. His madness was caused by evil spirits dwelling in him.

2. The result of this indwelling:

a. The first result was that he tortured himself. The evil spirits dwelling in him caused him to lose his mind and logical thinking. He became a stranger to himself, living in graves, torturing and cutting himself with stones. The poor man suffered from schizophrenia, for we see two contradicting personalities in him: one that made him bow down before Christ, and the other that made him cry out: "What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." Someone who is far from the Lord finds ruin and civil war within himself, as we read in Romans 7 and Galatians 5 about the two natures in ourselves. This opposition is between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. The two oppose one another, so that a person finds himself doing what he does not want to do!

The poor man was squeezed between his desire for healing and salvation and the desire of the demons dwelling within him!

b. This man had become a stranger to himself and to those around him, as well. He had attacked the people of the area, so they did not treat him as a poor, sick man, but as a violent beast and a

destructive savage, shackling him with chains. When sin enters our life, it makes us strangers to ourselves and to those around us. When we want to be good, sin makes us hate ourselves and others.

Adam wrote the first love poem in the world, extolling Eve. He said: ``This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23). But when sin entered his heart, this poet changed his attitude towards the woman he loved. He said to the Lord: ``The woman whom You gave to be with me..." putting all the blame on her, although he was just as responsible as she, and even more, because he was the leader of the household and the head of the family. In this way, Satan enters the life of man, filling it with evil nature, pride, deceit and lies, so that the ties of man with those around him are sundered.

c. The result of the man's demon-possession was that he avoided Christ. When he saw Christ coming towards him, he tried to annoy Him. The lunatic tried to avoid what Christ wanted for him. He refused the thought, knowledge, influence and blessing of Christ. As a result he did not fulfil Christ's expectations for him. Christ came to grant him a better life, but he went to live in the graves, annoying himself and others, withdrawing from the good works which God had already prepared for him to walk in.

d. But he changed completely when Christ dealt with him and did in him what he would later do in Saul of Tarsus. Saul had the same attitude, kicking against the goads, annoying both himself and the Church at the same time. Nevertheless, Christ confronted him, changed him and gave him a new life (The story of the conversion of Saul is found in Acts 9,22,26).

I wonder if we choose God or God chooses us? We find both thoughts in the Bible. God chooses us, because He takes the initiative. We answer to being chosen. God takes the first step. We

take the second. Because we are dead in our sins, we are unable to take the first step in repentance. We do not understand that God is the One who had taken the first step. For it is the Holy Spirit who gives life to the dead. The dead answer to the work of the Holy Spirit. ``God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

How many are the means through which Christ brings the soul to the paths of righteousness ``for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3)! How mighty the change which happened to the lunatic! He became sane in mind, put on clothes and sat down to listen to Christ who strengthened his heart to love Him by His saving power. This is what happens with us as well, for reason enters our heads. When we begin to think with Christ's mind, we discover what is for our best. Because we are at peace, we sit down after having run long. His perfect love has cast out our fear, and we are clothed with righteousness and salvation.

e. The climax of what happened to this man was that the Lord chose him as His messenger to carry the good news of salvation to his people. He wanted to follow Christ, but He told him: ``Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, how He has had compassion on you." His friends had feared him, so they had tied him with shackles, but he smashed them and run after his friends to kill them. Now, after being healed, he went to them, not to frighten them, but to reassure them. They did not run away from him. Instead, they run with him to the Saviour whom he had come to know.

Christ charged him with preaching the good news to his friends, but he desired something else. However, the climax of our joy is when our desire agrees with Christ's commands in his charge to us. How beautiful it is that Christ touches our lives and then charges us to be His messengers, who will tell the most wondrous message about Him, because He puts the most beautiful

message of good news in our mouth: ``The Gospel of Jesus Christ"!

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

We would assume that the people of the area would have been happy about the healing of the possessed man. They benefited from his healing, because he had been a nuisance. We would think that his healing would have delighted them because his wretched lunacy, which was destroying him, had ended. But sadly enough, they were not delighted. They were not happy, for their thoughts turned on something less important than all that: the herd of swine which threw themselves into the lake and drowned!

This is one of the two miracles of Christ which caused damage: his cursing of the fig tree and this one, causing the swine to perish.

We wonder why He let the swine perish. Could He not have spared this animal treasure together with working the miracle of healing? Yes, He could have. But there is a heavenly intention at work here. Letting the swine perish was intended to wake the people up to the fact that by keeping swine they were breaking the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 14:8). It was also intended to heal them from the love of money and from the fleshly way of thinking which was devoid of mercy for the possessed man who was healed. This was the purpose, together with saving the man from his illness. They loved their earthly works more than the wretched, poor man. Nobody can serve two masters, neither can anyone serve God and money (Matthew 6:24).

Christ also wanted to show the people how dreadful Satan's servitude is. The swine were unable to bear the indwelling of the devils. They perished. How much more are their effect on the eternal destiny of whoever agrees to follow Satan and his evil ways!

Christ has the right to employ symbolic means to demonstrate His truth. He cursed a fig tree so that it withered (Matthew 21:20) in order to condemn hypocrisy. Here He condemns impurity. For people in that age considered swine to be a symbol of evil desires and corruption, the same way we today consider the fox a symbol of cunning and deception. The Jews looked upon swine with contempt because of the health risk involved in eating their meat, the ritual impurity according to the law of Moses, and also because of their savage malice.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ is always at work:

``My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). He crossed the Sea of Galilee to the country of the Gadarenes in order to meet this poor man and heal him.

Whenever we see evil spreading and dominating the world, we think that God is not working on earth. The children of Israel said in the days of the prophet Zephaniah: ``The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil" (1:12), because they found evil people succeeding and the believers going through tribulations. Let us, however, be fully confident that the Lord will do good, that the Kingdom of God is in a state of permanent mobilisation, and that God also inflicts evil in punishing wickedness.

Christ went to where the sick man was, because He is the Good Shepherd who searches for the lost sheep until He finds it. Then He did His work within the possessed man, and sent him to work and preach and proclaim the joyous news.

2. Christ came to set everyone free to move:

The demons said to Him: ``What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Christ says that when the Stronger One comes, He chains the strong one and distributes his booty (Matthew 12:29). When

the devil takes possession of someone's life, he turns him into a thing without value and destroys his humanity. But Christ, the Stronger One, chains the devil and saves the victim, and makes the one who has been healed free to move to the glory of God, contrary to the condition he was in before!

Christ set the healed man free to move. He made him bow down before Him, made him receive healing, and then sent him to his friends. For when Christ enters into our lives, He moves us to serve Him. When we receive salvation, we make a significant beginning which requires continuous commitment. We offer our time, our money and our bodies as a living, holy and well-pleasing sacrifice on His altar of consecration, so that we are always at Christ's disposal (Romans 12:1,2).

3. Christ agreed to the request of the demons and the owners of the swine, whereas He refused that of the sick man who was healed!

a. The demons asked Him not to send them away from the country, and He agreed. We do not know the wisdom in this request. Perhaps they wanted to stay in the area in order to stir up its people against Him. We do know that the demons have opportunity to work here on earth until the day of judgment (Jude 6). It appears that every group of them have a place where they work. Knowing the customs and weaknesses of its inhabitants they can attack them better. Christ granted their request in order to demonstrate that "Surely, the wrath of man shall praise You; with the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself" (Psalm 76:10). Jesus also granted them this in order to demonstrate how terrible their destruction would be, and how tremendous the salvation of the man whom He had rescued from their claws.

Moreover, Christ agreed to the request of the people of the country that He go away and leave them alone. Maybe they would have hated to hear Christ rebuke their other sins, so they asked Him to

keep away from them, ``For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:20). Thus was fulfilled what God had said through the prophet Hosea: ``Woe to them when I depart from them!" (Hosea 9:12).

b. On the other hand, Christ refused the request of the man who had been healed to accompany Him. Christ wanted the man to testify to His grace before the people of his town, who had refused Christ!

Is it not strange that Christ accepts the request of the demons and the people of the country, and refuses that of the one who was healed?

God forces no one to follow Him for there is no compulsion in love. But as God's children we have an obligation. When God finds in our heart a desire which disagrees with this heavenly obligation, He refuses it because He wants us to implement His charge to us in order that the Kingdom may progress. For God does not charge strangers with serving His kingdom, but only His children.

May God grant us that we carry out His intention within our family, our homes and our community, which needs the good news of salvation.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, who occupies Yourself with us in all our circumstances, we thank You! Your heart moves for our suffering, misery, and bondage; therefore we thank You. You come to us when we lose sound mind and restore to us the health that we forfeited because of sin. Cause us to return to You, O Lord, so we may repent, and bring us back to You so that we may come back. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you reconcile Matthew's account that Christ healed the demon-possessed man in the country of the Gergesenes with Mark's and Luke's that He healed him in the country of the Gadarenes?
2. Why did the demon call himself ``Legion"?
3. In what way was the lunatic a stranger to himself and his community?
4. Which is the @rst love poem in the world? And what made its composer change his mind concerning what he had said in it?
5. Why did Christ make the swine perish?
6. What was the new movement which Christ created in the lunatic who was healed?
7. What do you think is the obligation Christ has charged you with?

THE THIRTEENTH MIRACLE

RAISING JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

²¹ When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ And pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." ²⁴ So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him.

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" ³⁶ Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." ³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat (Mark 5:21-24,35-43, see also Matthew 9:18-26 and Luke 8:41-56).

The town of Capernaum witnessed many of Christ's miracles. This one, the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, happened in the same town.

Christ raised three persons from the dead in different places; each had been dead for a different period of time. He raised Jairus' daughter at home, and the son of the widow of Nain at the town gate, on the day they died. But Lazarus was already in his tomb when Christ raised him, having been dead for four days.

These three miracles show us three measures of the sinful soul which is far from Christ. The first one is an inwardly sinful soul whose sin is ``at home", unseen by outsiders, but nevertheless it is dead in its sins and needs the command of Christ: ``Talitha kumi" which means, ``Little girl, I say to you get up" (Mark 5:41).

The second degree of a sinful soul is ``at the town gate". Its sin is apparent to all, like the sins of the tongue, the ear, the hand or the eye. This is a soul which needs Christ's command: ``Young man, I say to you, arise!"

Man's sin then develops into the third step. It becomes corrupt, rotten and chronic, apparent to everyone, like Lazarus when he had been in the tomb for four days. This is a soul which needs the command of Christ: ``Come forth!" (John 11:43).

In all these instances we see Christ as the One Who raises the dead and resurrects life, because He is the Way, the Truth, the Resurrection and the Life.

Let us meditate on this miracle, considering:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The first needy person in this miracle is the girl who died:

The Gospel of Matthew says that Jairus told Jesus that she ``had died", whereas the Gospel of Mark says that Jairus said: ``My little daughter lies at the point of death." The truth is that when Jairus

left his house, she was at the point of death. When he came to where Christ was, he did not know whether his daughter was still alive or had died. So he described her once as having died, and another time as being at the point of death, for he said: "My little daughter is at her last breath. If only you would come and lay your hands on her, that she may be healed, she will live." He uses the word "be healed" because she is ill, and the word "will live" because she has died. Jairus was not sure of his daughter's condition, so in one instance, he spoke about how serious her condition was, and in another instance about her death.

Often the one who needs Christ is unable to utter or express his need, like Jairus' daughter, so the Lord uses someone else as their substitute to clarify his condition. Here we have a sinner who knows that he needs Christ's mercy. The sinners who do not understand their sin, sin much and have given up all hope in the Lord's mercy. Or perhaps their eyes have become blind to their sins, and therefore they need someone to explain their need and present it before the throne of the Lord.

May God, then, give us grace to express people's need for Christ, so that we can speak to them about the Lord, and speak to the Lord about them by praying for them.

2. The second needy person is Jairus:

a. Jairus the speaker: Jairus was the second person in need of the miracle, being the one who expressed his daughter's need. Jairus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Ya'ir", as Elias is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Elijah", and Jonas the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Jonah". The name Jairus in Hebrew means "He enlightens". It is also the name of one of the judges of Israel, known by the name of "Ya'ir the Gileadite".

b. Jairus who saw and believed: Jairus was one of several rulers of the synagogue of the Jews in Capernaum. Perhaps he was one of those who went to Christ, representing the centurion who loved

the Jews and had built their synagogue, in order to ask for the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:3). Jairus would have seen the miracle of the healing of the sick man. Christ had healed him from a distance and Jairus, then, understood the power of Christ's authority. When the attempts of the doctors failed to help his sick daughter, he decided to go to Christ to inform Him in person about his only daughter, who was about to die at the age of twelve.

c. Jairus, the unable and grieving man: Often the Lord leaves us beleaguered in a severe situation or dilemma with no way out but seeking refuge in Him. In the Lord's love He lets us go through hardship and lets us feel powerless in order that we may seek refuge in His divine mercies. Grief and powerlessness are two means which the Lord always uses to our own good.

d. Jairus, the humble believer: Jairus behaved humbly before Christ. ``When he saw Him, he fell at His feet." The Jewish religious leaders saw in Christ only a popular preacher, who did not have the proper theological training to be allowed the title ``Teacher". How, then, could Jairus, the cultured and learned man, prostrate himself at the feet of a popular preacher from Nazareth? That was true humility.

e. Jairus also behaved as a believer in Christ: He said to Him: ``Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live." He said this because he had seen Christ perform miracles in Capernaum before.

f. He also behaved relentlessly: ``(he) begged Him earnestly". His grief for his daughter was urgent, and therefore he was relentless in his plea to Christ.

g. Jairus behaved courageously: He prostrated himself before Christ, pleading with Him in front of all the people, while the

leaders of the Jews were already plotting to kill Christ. He did this because his love for his daughter compelled him.

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. Jairus' friends:

While Jairus was speaking, his friends came from his house and told him: ``Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" (Mark 5:35). These friends were not lying. They were bringing true news. But the conclusion they reached was wrong: ``Why trouble the Teacher any further?" The Teacher is not troubled and never gets tired of doing good. The word ``any further" does not apply to Him, for Christ is the Lord of the past, the present and the future. He hastened to encourage Jairus with His words which revived hope in his heart after his friends had destroyed it. Christ told him: ``Do not be afraid; only believe" (Mark 5:36).

Often we hear very reasonable words from those around us. If we do not take Christ into account, their judgment fills us with despair and bitterness. But thanks be to God, because Christ restores confidence to us. In our souls He raises hope anew.

2. The wailers and the hired mourners:

``Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly" (Mark 5:38). Matthew says: ``When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, `Make room'" (9:23). It was customary to hire women to mourn and musicians to bewail the dead. There was a great number of them in Jairus' house, playing sad tunes, intoning poems of lamentation and mourning, in order to stir up sentiments of sadness by rending their garments and slapping their faces in grief. When Christ then told them that the girl was not dead, but sleeping, their sadness and weeping changed into ridiculing and mocking Christ. Their sadness was not real, but hired. Their

condolence was annoying. How cruel and empty are the comments of some as they look on difficult situations!

Christ did not declare His glory to those hirelings. He threw all of them out. How far the mockers are from repentance and faith!

3. The disciples in training:

Peter, John and James were among the eye-witnesses to this miracle. They are the same three whom Jesus took with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2), and to the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33) because He was training them intensively to train the rest of the disciples. In this way the knowledge of Christ's power, authority and love could reach more people. To this day, we hear: ``And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ, the loving One:

Before He performed the miracle of raising Jairus' daughter in Capernaum, Christ had already healed a man with a withered hand in the town synagogue on a Sabbath when Jewish people don't work. ``Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him" (Mark 3:6), because He had broken the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum, must have been among those leaders. But Jesus did not hold a grudge against Jairus and his colleagues because of their past plotting against Him. He could have told Jairus: ``When things were going easily for you, you wanted to kill me. Now, when things have gone badly for you, why are you seeking My help?" But Christ is not like that. He is the loving One, from Whom we hear no refusal when our situation gets bad. True, we rush to Him and complain about our situation; but when things get better, maybe we go away from Him. But He tells us in every situation:

``Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15).

On His way to Jairus' house in order to raise his dead daughter, Christ turned His heart to a woman who needed healing, one who suffered from hemorrhages. After her healing there arose a conversation between them, intended to strengthen her faith and that of Jairus before Christ arrived to his house in order to raise his daughter. Christ stopped his procession in spite of the urgency of Jairus' need because all Christ's deeds are love. He had come to serve, not to be served, and to give His life as a ransom for many. The Lord's deeds are deeds of continuous love, an unbroken chain of touches of goodness from the wellspring that never runs dry.

2. Christ, the Encourager:

Christ saw a spark of faith in Jairus' heart so He kindled it. He told him: ``Do not be afraid; only believe." How surprising Christ is, for He removes the scars of men's soul-harming words! As we read in the Gospel of Matthew: ``Then the Pharisees went out and took counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there; and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. And He warned them not to make Him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: `Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen, my Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory. And in His name Gentiles will trust'" (Matthew 12:14-21, quotation from Isaiah 42:1-4). Christ breathed on Jairus' weak faith that it might become strong by healing the woman suffering from hemorrhages on the way.

The Lord called death "sleeping", saying: "She is not dead, but sleeping" (Matthew 9:24). This is the same description He gives of Lazarus' death: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (John 11:11).

The Greek word for cemetery means "sleeping place". This is what the Greeks wanted it to be, yet they could not achieve it. Christ made it reality for us. He encourage us to await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

3. Christ, the life giver:

He took the hand of the little dead girl and told her: "Talitha, kumi", which means "Little girl, I say to you, arise." This was the tender word with which the mother would wake up her daughter every morning. How tender Christ the Reviver is with the body of the dead girl!

And how tender Christ the Reviver is with the transgressor, dead in his sins and transgressions! "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). Then it will come true what the apostle Paul said: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins... But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us... made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:1-10).

How tender Christ the Reviver is when He raises the believer every day from his slips and sins so that "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Psalm 37:24). He gives him spiritual food to eat which upholds and satisfies him, so that he can walk in the strength of that food (1 Kings 19:8).

How tender Christ the Reviver is when He comes again and "all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth: those

who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28).

Reach out and take Christ's hand, that He may raise you up from your death to a mighty work!

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for Christ who raised the dead, and still raises the dead in sin by giving them eternal life which is by the new birth, and who will raise the dead at His coming again to judge the world and reward everyone according their work.

Grant us in Him a renewed life which is eternal. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Who are the three whom Christ raised from the dead?
2. We see in the three whom Christ raised from the dead three degrees in the soul which is far from Christ. Which are they?
3. How do you explain that Jairus according to the Gospel of Matthew says: "My daughter has just died", while, according to the Gospel of Mark, he says: "My daughter lies at the point of death" and Luke says: "She was dying"?
4. What does the name Jairus mean?
5. Why does God allow us to go through severe situations?
6. Who are those who derided Christ when He said that Jairus' daughter was "sleeping"?
7. Explain how Christ showed His love to Jairus.

THE FOURTEENTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE WOMAN FROM A FLOW OF BLOOD

²⁵And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. ²⁸Because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." ²⁹Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. ³⁰At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" ³²But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:25-34, see also Matthew 9:20-22 and Luke 8:43-48).

A woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came to stop Christ who was on His way to Capernaum to the house of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, in order to raise his daughter from death. The woman said to herself "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well", thinking that no one would notice if she did touch them. Christ noticed, stopped the procession and asked: "Who touched Me?" His disciples were amazed at this question, because the crowd was not only touching Him but thronging around Him. Christ knew that healing power had gone out of Him as an answer to the faith of the woman suffering from a flow of blood. As the woman understood that she had been found out, she approached Him and fell down before

Him and told Him the whole truth. He displayed His grace to her by more than just healing her body, He gave her eternal life and peace within her heart as well. Thus He gave her the blessing of obtaining from Him healing of her body and her soul at the same time.

In this miracle of healing the woman who had a flow of blood, we see Christ as the One Who is always untiringly at work. On His way to raise Jairus' daughter, He undertook the healing of the woman. The apostle Peter testified to the Lord's work when he told the household of Cornelius ``how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

Christ also testified about Himself: ``My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). He also said: ``I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4,5). A psalm of ascents says: ``He... shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper" (Psalm 121:4,5), so with Him it is always daytime, because He is light, and there is no darkness in Him.

In this miracle let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The condition of the woman who had a flow of blood:
a. Physical sickness: Her physical disease had been chronic and incurable for twelve years. She had been hoping all the years of her illness that she would ®nd a cure and be healed. However, she never managed to ®nd any cure to her disease. Her condition was deteriorating. The Gospel describes her ́ow of blood as

being "the fountain of her blood", so it was a serious illness. But thanks to God, she met the greatest physician.

b. Psychological sickness: She was distressed and saddened. The Gospel says, she "had suffered" and her condition "grew worse". She was ashamed to speak about her illness. What, we wonder, might her husband have thought of her? Did she find in him a helper in the hour of need? Or did he marry someone else? If this was what had happened, how hurt she would have felt in her femininity!

c. Ritual sickness: She had the law of Moses against her, forbidding her to touch any person or thing in order not to defile them. "Every bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and whatever she sits on shall be unclean, as the unclean of her impurity" (Leviticus 15:26). "If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening" (Leviticus 15:19).

d. Financial poverty: She had spent all she had in vain. She was financially ruined. Most probably, people stopped helping her pay for her treatment because they saw how futile it was. Her poor health did not allow her to work, and no Jew was prepared to employ her in any way lest he became unclean!

We may encounter a similar situation. We may be in chronic difficulties, so that our psychological condition deteriorates, and maybe we find no help from any religious or social source, so all doors are closed. But we do have a hope, namely that a door different from all other doors will open wide for us, because God gives a way out each and every time we are in tribulation.

2. The faith of the woman with a flow of blood:

The woman's faith in Christ's power was real. She thought to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well"

(Matthew 9:21). Christ acknowledged it. She was full of hope and determination to overcome any difficulties which might keep her from meeting Christ. From this we can see that the suffering of the woman was a spiritual blessing to her. It was the suffering that made her turn to Christ to rescue and save her.

A businessman who was once constrained to lie on his back for 45 days said: ``More than 45 years ago I forgot praying. I stopped talking to the Lord. I was busy with my accounting and my businesses, so the Lord made me lie down on my back in order to direct my vision towards Him alone, and He healed me." He is truly the God who does not let us be tried above what we can endure. He tries us in order to turn us towards Him.

3. The woman with the flow of blood after her healing:

a. After having been healed, she came up to Jesus fearing the rebuke of the scribes, and fearing that she had made Christ ritually unclean. Jesus reassured and encouraged her and gave her more than she requested!

b. She came to Him in worship, for she prostrated herself before Him.

c. She came confessing, ``[she] told Him the whole truth." He is the One Who knows everything before it happens. Our confession does not add anything to the information He has, but He helps us to be open towards His holiness.

d. She came to Him as a saved woman for He had told her: ``Go in peace, and be healed of your all iction." She was delivered from the sickness of soul and body at the same time.

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. Jairus, a man in a hurry:

Jairus faced a greater calamity, for when he left his house his daughter was at the point of dying. Undoubtedly he was critical of

Christ for stopping and asking, ``Who touched Me?" Jairus saw his own problem as the only one in the world. He had a bigger problem, one that made any other problem seem small!

However, the Lord of heaven and earth belongs to all humanity. In His heart there is room and in His time a share for everybody. When we bring a problem close to our eyes, we see nothing else. But Christ wants us to see people through His eyes and the world through His authority, so that our vision can be adjusted and our mental attitude corrected. In this way problems acquire their natural size. Thus, we do not constantly think about ourselves only, but also about others. For Christ has sufficient resources for everyone. There is no need to compare the way Christ deals with others with how He deals with us, for love is the only thing which grows whenever it is distributed. Whenever it is given to many, it grows and develops.

2. The disciples, asked in denunciation:

The disciples asked in disapproval, ``You see the people crowding against you, and yet you can ask, `Who touched Me?'" Touching Christ was the ordinary thing. The disciples rejected the question of Jesus. They thought they know more than He did. They refused before they knew that Christ knew more than they. He, not they, is the Master of the problem and the question. How beautiful His word is: ``Judge not, that you may not be judged" (Matthew 7:1).

We sometimes direct questions to Christ as if we knew everything, as if we understand better than He the ways to realise His goals, and as if we know better than He what serves His kingdom best!! We often reproach God as if we want to reform His way of thinking. May God forgive us for our lack of humility and give us the Spirit of grace to pay full attention to His word, trusting that there is a purpose to every word He says. For when Christ asked about the

woman with the flow of blood, He wanted to bless her more in bringing her into a personal relationship with Him.

The disciples did not understand the difference between being touched in a crowd and the intentional touch of faith. They talked about the thronging which caused people to bump into each other, whereas Christ talked about the touch itself, the touch of closeness, love and need, the touch which heals and satisfies. Maybe John thought about this when He wrote: ``That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1 John 1:1,2).

We need to touch Christ in confidence and faith without the confused kind of worship which is devoid of concentration and contemplation.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Jesus, the famous One:

When the woman heard that Jesus was coming, she joined the crowd and came up to Him from behind and touched His clothes, for His renown had become wide-spread: ``And they came to Him from every quarter" (Mark 1:45). He is unique; there is no one like Him. He was born of a virgin in order that the first promise might be fulfilled, namely that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). He lived a sinless life. He rolled the stone away from his tomb and rose because it was not possible for death to hold Him. Alone He vanquished the grave and sat at the right hand of the Power on high. He is the only One who is worthy of interceding for us, and that for two reasons: a) He needs no intercession, for He never sinned. b) He is the only One

who paid the wages of sin and settled our debt. He intercedes for us by right of His redemption.

Because of His great reputation for miraculous healings the woman with the flow of blood thought of touching "the border of His garment" (Luke 8:44). The law of Moses commanded the children of Israel to wear garments with tassels, that they might remember the Lord's commandments to them (Numbers 15:37-41). The suffering woman reckoned that touching just the tassel would suffice for healing.

2. Jesus, the powerful One:

Christ felt that a power had issued from Him, causing the chronic flow of blood to dry up immediately. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). "And your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast. [For the Lord in His mercy cares for all His creatures.] How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house. And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light. Oh, continue Your loving-kindness to those who know You. And Your righteousness to the upright in heart" (Psalm 36:5-10).

3. Jesus, the knowing One:

Christ knew about the power that had issued from Him, and from which the woman benefited, therefore He asked: "Who touched me?" Often a father knows which of his children has done something, but he asks who did it anyway, not because he does not know, but in order that the one who has done it may come to confess so that he can forgive him and give him peace. Christ

asked, not because He did not know, but because He wanted the woman to come to Him so that there could be a direct relationship between Him and her. He did not want her to be a mere beggar asking alms from Him, but to be a daughter of the heavenly Father, receiving much more than she asked for or could think of.

He wanted to grant her courage and access to the throne of grace by a personal relationship with Him, so that her life might be satisfied from the fullness of His house.

This knowing Christ said to Nathanael: ``Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (John 1:48). John the Evangelist says about Him: ``(He) had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

4. Jesus, the Saviour:

After Christ had asked ``Who touched Me?" He told the woman who had been suffering from the flow of blood: ``Your faith has made you well. Go in peace." The Lord asked Adam: ``Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) because He wanted to save and forgive him. Likewise He asked Cain in Genesis 4:9: ``Where is your brother?" because He wanted to stir his conscience and give him a chance to repent. Elisha had asked: ``Where did you go, Gehazi?" (2 Kings 5:25) in order to awaken his conscience.

God asks us questions in order that we might confess. He wants to grant us more of His gifts and blessings. He wants us to discover ourselves and our shortcomings by putting the spotlight on them, and then bring us treatment, healing and forgiveness.

5. Jesus, the Giver:

Christ gave three gifts to the woman who had suffered from a flow of blood:

a. Con®dence: ``Be of good cheer" He said in order to assure her that her future needs would be met, guaranteed by His promise. Christ says: ``Until now you have asked nothing in My name"

(John 16:24). Often we ask small favours from God, like success and physical healing. But there are more profound blessings, the blessings of the Spirit, and those we should confidently ask for.

b. He granted her adoption: "Daughter, your faith has made you well." "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

c. He granted her peace: "Go in peace." He gave her all this in addition to healing "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:1,2).

Christ has grace in abundance. We do not want to touch only the hem of His garment, but to live in Christ, so that He owns us and we commit our lives to Him unreservedly and unconditionally, in order that He may be the everlasting King over our lives.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, however big our problem may be, You have its perfect solution. However badly we are affected by failure, You make out of the valley of disturbance and despair a gate of hope. We bow our heads before You, and surrender to You the reins of our lives in order to make them better and honourable lives. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Name two verses which explain that Christ is always at work.
2. Why was the woman with the flow of blood suffering psychologically, and why ritually?
3. Why did God allow the businessman to be constrained to lying on his back for 45 days?

4. What are the blessings of Christ's delay in going to Jairus' house?
5. What is the difference between an aimless touch and the intentional touch of faith?
6. Why did Christ want the woman who had suffered from the flow of blood to come to Him after she had been healed from her physical illness?
7. Name the three blessings which Christ granted this woman.

THE FIFTEENTH MIRACLE

HEALING TWO BLIND MEN

²⁷As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, ``Have mercy on us, Son of David!" ²⁸ When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, ``Do you believe that I am able to do this?" ``Yes, Lord," they replied. ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, ``According to your faith will it be done to you." ³⁰And their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, ``See that no one knows about this." ³¹ But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region (Matthew 9:27-31).

Christ opened the eyes of the two blind men on the same day that He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead and healed the woman with a flow of blood. After these latter miracles, Christ set out for Simon Peter's house. While He was on His way, two blind men called out with a loud voice: ``Son of David, have mercy on us!" They must have heard the news of His miracles in that region, and known that He was to arrive shortly. They must have known that He was the Son of David, the Saviour. They understood that He had a mighty authority over diseases, nature, demons and death itself. There was nothing that did not submit to Him. He said: ``All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." His authority in heaven is clearly demonstrated in that He forgives sins, grants eternal life, answers prayer and intercedes. His authority on earth is demonstrated in healing and protection, since He sends His angels from heaven to care for the believers, for ``the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him" (Psalm 34:7).

Christ was on His way from Jairus' house to Peter's in Capernaum, when two blind men followed Him into the house and came to Him. Jesus asked them: ``Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said, ``Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying,

``According to your faith, let it be to you." Their eyes were opened. Jesus then asked them not to tell anyone about it, but they did not obey His order. When they had left the house, they spread the news to everyone.

Let us consider in this miracle:

1. The ones in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The two blind men:

In the Bible, blindness symbolises sin, which is spiritual blindness, because the sinner sees neither his evil condition, nor Christ's atonement. Blindness also symbolises ignorance, as ignorance does not see the reality of things.

These two blind men symbolise all of humanity, whose eyes are blind to God's love and its own sin, which is described in the book of Deuteronomy: ``And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you" (28:29). Isaiah describes it in this way: ``Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.... Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! for brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as at twilight; we are as dead men in desolate places" (Isaiah 59:1-10).

Scriptures describe salvation from sin as opening the eyes, as in Isaiah: ``In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (29:18,19). Paul says: ``For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the

Lord" (Ephesians 5:8). The day of salvation is the day when the ears shall be opened to hear the voice of Christ and the eyes shall be opened to see His light. Jesus said: ``I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

2. Need had joined them together:

The common affliction had joined the two men together. Often the Lord sends us troubles which are hard to deal with alone, so we meet together. It is beautiful when there is mutual agreement with a companion in prayer for one and the same thing, as Christ says: ``If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). When hearts are united in lifting up requests to God in harmony and mutual understanding, they find an answer from heaven.

3. The clear insight of the two men:

Their eyes were blind, but their insight was clear! For they knew Christ, the Son of David, as the coming Saviour.

When Christ performed His miracles, the Jewish religious leaders would say that it was by Beelzebub, the chief of the evil spirits, that He drove out demons (Mark 3:22). But the two blind men called: ``Have mercy on us, Son of David", because they believed that He was the expected Saviour, the conqueror of death. They had heard about His miracles, so they understood that He was the One whom Isaiah had prophesied about: ``There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (11:1,2), The prophet Ezekiel said: ``I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My

servant David a prince among them" (34:23,24). So these two men had an insight which the religious leaders did not have!

4. The trusting faith of the two men:

When Christ asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" they answered, "Yes, Lord." The faith which expects little, receives little. That which expects failure, receives failure. The faith of these two men expected to receive eyesight and they did!

Faith is the bucket which we lower into a deep well in order to draw the water of life. It is the purse which does not make its owner rich, but is rich with the treasure which is stored in it. Faith is not important in itself, but the object in which it is placed is. Faith is the means by which we obtain the blessing bestowed upon us by Christ. Christ Himself is the bestower of the blessing. He is the One who makes life rich, and who quenches the heart. True faith is built on scriptural foundations. It is not built on human promises, but on God's word. This is what the two blind men did, when they believed that the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Their faith was active. They prayed, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." It was persistent, for they exerted a great effort, since they pursued Christ and kept walking until they reached the house which He entered. This they did, despite the fact that they could not see anything. This is the faith which does not give up but waits: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

Their faith was also cooperative. Each of them was concerned for the other. They remained together, calling upon the Lord in order to receive mercy.

Christ honoured their faith by opening their eyes so that they could behold the face of the Living One. And what a face, resplendent, radiant with love, goodness and grace!

5. Their loving disobedience:

When Christ healed the two blind men, He told them, "See that no one knows it." But they spread the news all over the region. We may call this "the disobedience of love", for they meant no evil, but for sheer joy over their healing and out of love for Christ they were unable to keep it a secret. They were too dazzled and amazed to be able to keep quiet, even though they knew the advice of the prophet Samuel: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

This may raise the question as to why Christ issued an order to keep silent about this affair, while He ordered publicity in other cases.

Christ ordered His disciples to be silent about the Transfiguration on the Mount (Matthew 17:9); and the leper that he should not tell anyone about his healing (Mark 1:44); and Jairus' family not to divulge the news about their daughter having been raised from the dead (Mark 5:43). But He did the opposite when He told the man who had been healed from the Legion to declare openly the news of his healing (Mark 5:19).

The answer to this question is that there is freedom in the work of God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is dynamic, active and moving. Consequently, we do not put the work of God's Spirit into a rigid mould, neither do we restrict His work, nor hinder it, but respond and submit to it. For silence about a miracle may be an act of obedience. Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces" (Matthew 7:6). In other circumstances it could be disobedience, for Christ said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I

have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19,20).

Every believer is obliged to be in direct contact with the Lord in order to heed His directions, step by step, each step according to its circumstances as God Himself sees them. This contact must be continuous and uninterrupted, regardless of the circumstances and the consequences. Just as yesterday's food is not sufficient for today, the divine direction and spiritual guidance from yesterday is not sufficient for today. We need to relate to God in prayer, in reading His word and in awareness of His actual presence with us in our everyday life. God let the heavenly manna fall to the Israelites every morning, in order that they might come to Him thankfully every morning to ask for the gift of His love. This is the dynamic of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of the movement of the Kingdom of God which is something living and actively at work, because it deals with living children.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ chose the time and place for the miracle:

The two blind men wanted the healing to take place on the way, at once. They shouted while they were on the way, asking for healing. However, Christ went on walking until He came to the house. There is no doubt that the timing and place of their healing was for their best, because Christ wanted to form a personal relationship with them. This is why He left them walking behind Him until they found themselves with Him inside the house.

Often, God seems to be late in answering prayer, but in reality He is not. Rather, He brings about the suitable condition for establishing the deepest and strongest relationship, in order that the heart may be filled with His grace before the body can enjoy His gifts. Christ delayed the healing until He arrived at the house, in order to perform the miracle in secret rather than openly. This is

confirmed by Christ's request to the two blind men not to broadcast the news of their healing.

2. Christ expressed His tenderness in a way which suited their condition:

Christ healed many by a word, but with the two blind men, it was by a touch. Someone who cannot see, can feel the touch. Christ healed the man born blind (John 9:6) and the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:23) in the same way.

God always speaks to us in a language we can understand, and deals with us in a way which is compatible with our way of thinking and our need, which He defines in His wisdom, reckoning with our condition and the social circumstances under which we live.

Christ performed these miracles in ancient times, but He is still prepared to perform them today. He wants to open your eyes to see His love and His way to the forgiveness of your sins, that you might obtain salvation and eternal life.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, thank You for healing the two blind men and opening their eyes. The first thing they saw was Your own beautiful face.

Shine on us with the light of Your face, so that we may see light by Your light. Open our eyes to Christ, the Light of the world. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the epithet "Son of David" mean?
2. What does blindness signify in the Bible?
3. What was it that held the two blind men together? What does this teach us?
4. Propose two comparisons which describe faith, and which we have mentioned in the explanation of this miracle.

5. Name two descriptions of the two blind men's faith.
6. What is the first reward the two blind men received?
7. Why did the two blind men disobey the order of Christ and spread the news of their healing abroad?

THE SIXTEENTH MIRACLE

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

¹Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias). ²And a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself (John 6:1-15, see also Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44 and Luke 9:10-17).

This miracle is distinguished by the fact that it is the only one which is mentioned in all the four gospels in full detail. The occasion for performing it was when Christ had sent His disciples

out to preach. They returned to Him to present a report on their ministry, on how God had blessed them and the Holy Spirit used them.

At that time, some of John the Baptist's disciples came to tell Christ that Herod had beheaded their teacher. Christ saw to it that He got away from the area controlled by Herod. He also wanted to give His disciples a chance to rest now that they were returning from their ministry. He, therefore, suggested to His disciples that they take a small boat and cross to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, to Bethsaida, so that they would have a chance to rest. It was springtime, shortly before the feast of Passover.

The multitudes were searching for Christ because they were in dire need of Him. Some of them were ill, others helpless, others again thirsting for a living word and instruction from an authority other than that of the scribes. When they knew that He was taking the sea route to the other side, they all walked on land to meet Him there.

When the boat had landed, Christ took His disciples with Him and went up into the mountains. Then He saw the multitudes coming towards Him, carrying their sick and hurrying as much as they could. He spent the day teaching them. When evening came, He did not want them to leave hungry, so He fed them, five thousand of them, with five loaves of bread and two fish!

Let us consider in this miracle:

1. The ones in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

Those in need were the five thousand men with their women and children. They were in need of instruction and care.

1. They needed instruction:

They came walking from the different cities, hungry for God, wanting to eat living bread. Often, believers think that people don't care for spiritual things, but that is not true. For when people find spiritual food, their appetite is whetted and they feel hunger. When they find a believer who behaves in a way that glorifies the Lord, they will ask what the reason is for the hope which is in him and for the way he lives. Those who are used to reacting with grief, resignation, anger or escapism will be amazed. When they see a believer enjoying the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, they will ask for the same blessing (Galatians 5:22,23). Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6)!

2. They needed care:

Christ saw them as sheep without a shepherd. It is the same with people today, burdened as they are with cares and anxieties. There are many like this, but the shepherds are few. How we need shepherds who will shepherd God's flock, purchased with the blood of Christ.

The multitudes listened to Christ's preaching. It became late, so they became hungry. This is where the work of Christ, the Good Shepherd, the mighty Shepherd of the sheep, comes in order to offer His perfect care.

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

Let us consider Christ's disciples, especially Philip and Andrew, and also the boy with the five loaves of bread and the two fish:

1. Philip:

Christ asked Philip a question in order to test him: ``Where shall we buy bread that these might eat?" Philip answered: ``Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every

one of them may have a little" (John 6:7). A denarius was a day's wages for a hired man. Two hundred denarii may be what was left in the common treasury of the group. In Philip's opinion they were poor, not owning enough.

This is natural, human reckoning considered to be wise, sound logic. It is reckoning the expenses with regard to themselves and their buying power only. It did not take into account the power of Christ. Christ, however, wanted to bring Philip back to the deep faith he had in the beginning, on the day He met him near the Jordan River around December in the year 26 AD, and told him: ``Follow Me!" (John 1:43-46). Philip had followed Christ and then gone away to call Nathanael to follow Christ, too. Christ wanted to give back to Philip the initial joy of being saved and the power of his first commitment, so that Philip could reach a new degree of power in his faith.

Christ tested Philip's faith so that he might see that Christ is not less than Moses, who fed and satisfied the children of Israel in the desert of Sinai with manna every day. Nor is He less than Elisha, who fed one hundred men with twenty loaves of bread, saying: ``Thus says the Lord: `They shall eat and have some left over'" (2 Kings 4:43).

Often our faith becomes weak and shaken, and we ask, ``From where will the food come?" However, when the Lord asks us to do something, He does not demand it merely from our own resources. He gives to us what we will give to others. He blesses us that we might bless others. When we take from Him and give, we bless and are blessed ourselves.

2. Andrew:

He is well-known for always introducing people to Christ. He introduced his brother Peter to Him (John 1:35-42). When the Greeks came asking Philip to arrange a meeting for them with Christ, Philip referred them to Andrew (John 12:22). Thus, Andrew

was trained to take people to where they would find blessing. Bishop D.T. Niles of Sri Lanka has proposed a definition of an evangelist: "A beggar who tells another beggar where he can find bread."

The meaning of the name Andrew is "verily, a man". So the one who was verily a man found Christ. This man was the one who led others to know Christ. Andrew was the one who could bring the boy to Christ and persuade him to offer the five loaves of bread and the two fish. Andrew's heart must have been so full of love and compassion. He gave the boy so much confidence that he was not afraid of him when He took him to Christ. When Andrew took his bread and fish from him, he offered it gladly.

Andrew did bring the five loaves and two fish to Christ with some reserve, saying, "...but what are they among so many?" (John 6:9). When he said "but" he indicated that he felt that his problem was greater than his confidence in Christ. Our faith also may become weak, in spite of our past experiences in faith, and we might say "but". However, Christ granted the weak faith a fresh vigor when He said: "Bring them here to Me'... He blessed and broke and gave the loaves" (Matthew 14:18,19).

3. The little boy:

He must have been perplexed, wondering at the miracles he saw taking place, listening to the words of grace from Christ's lips, so much so that he forgot his food and did not eat from it since the morning. It is the same with us when we see Jesus with the eyes of faith, so that He overrules the possessions of our hearts and makes us forget our problems and troubles. The deadly power of the flesh does not return, because Christ lifts us up and makes us think on a higher level.

When the boy met Christ, Christ filled him with love, so that he would share the little he had with all the needy people.

4. The disciples:

Christ had sent the disciples out to preach after having given them authority to do so, and now they had come back to Him in order to present their report, saying: ``Even the demons are subject to us in Your name." However, when the multitudes came, they said to Him: ``Send the multitude away" (Luke 9:12). They had obtained spiritual power, but they were still in need of more love and a stronger desire to help people.

The disciples had seen Jesus as the Loving One and as the Strong One. Usually, we are first impressed by force, and then we are impressed by love. The disciples needed to learn more love and to practice it more, for Christ commanded them to give the multitudes something to eat by taking from Him and give what they received to the others. They were not the ones who had made the bread, neither did they persuade the people to take it. They only gave what Christ had given them. Today, we cannot persuade people to repent, but we can obey Christ and offer people the bread of life, and God's Holy Spirit Himself will persuade people to partake of it.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ, the One who gives rest:

He is the One who says: ``Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Christ understands our bodies' need for rest. The body of the believer is a temple for the Holy Spirit, and God's Spirit dwells in it. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak and therefore, Christ does not think about our spirit only but also about our body. That is why He said to His disciples: ``Come aside by ourselves to a deserted place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

2. Christ feels the need:

When He lifted His eyes and saw the multitude around Him, He asked Philip: ``Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

(John 6:5). He feels the need before the ones in need do. Our heavenly Father ``knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8).

3. Christ tests the faith:

Therefore, He asked Philip: ``Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" ``But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do" (John 6:6). God allows His children to be tested in order to make them succeed. He does not want to cause them to fall prey to despair, but to grant them more learning in order that they may discover the aspects of their weakness and trust more in Him.

Christ's reaction to Philip might well have been a reproach, since Philip had seen many of Christ's miracles and must have known that Christ was capable of feeding the multitudes. However, Christ made him realise his weakness and his continuous need to trust in Him. It was not possible for Philip to make himself independent of Christ. Without Christ he could do nothing, but with Him he could do all things.

4. Christ organises the ranks:

Jesus said: ``Make the people sit down... gather up the fragments that remain" (John 6:10-12). He wants us to be organised, ``Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Furthermore, He does not want us to think about our own personal benefit only, but also as a fellowship group. He does not want us to disturb each other by being disorganised, so that one person takes more than he needs, while his neighbour does not find what he needs. Our problem is in distribution, not production. After having organised the people and distributed the food, Christ asked for the remaining fragments to be gathered in order that they might find food afterwards, and in order to keep the green grass clean and protect the environment from pollution. It is nice

when we leave our place clean for those who come after us, so that we may find it clean when they leave it to us.

5. Christ creates:

“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life” (John 1:3,4). Christ made in a moment what it takes nature several months to make, sowing, growing, harvesting, grinding and baking. He did the same in His first miracle, when He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). He concentrated nature's work and gifts. He commands and it comes into effect, because He is the Lord of nature and the One who has authority, the mighty Creator and the One who is unlimited by time.

6. Christ satisfies the soul and the heart:

The Jews thought that He was the political saviour they expected. They tried to make Him their king in order that He might save them from the yoke of the Romans and feed them with bread. This was not what Christ had in mind, so He withdrew from their midst. He did not want to be an earthly king (John 6:15). Those who have earthly power only make a small group of people happy and only for a short time. But in the spiritual kingdom, the blessing extends to include all and stays for eternity. When this present world ends, there will be the kingdom of the world to come. Christ commented on their attempt to make Him king saying: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:47-51).

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, You think about us even when we forget about ourselves. Create in us hunger and thirst for Your person, that we may receive the living bread that gives us satisfaction and strength with You. Then Christ's word will be realised for us: “Blessed are those

who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Christ ask His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida?
2. "People are not hungry for the living bread" is this saying true or false? Prove that your answer is correct.
3. "Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?" Why did Christ ask His disciple Philip this question?
4. What does the name "Andrew" mean? And why was it an appropriate name?
5. Why did the boy forget to eat his bread and fish since the morning?
6. In this miracle, we see Christ as the Creator. Explain how.
7. Why did Christ withdraw after having fed the five thousand?

THE SEVENTEENTH MIRACLE

WALKING ON THE WATER

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸ "Lord, if it is you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:22-33, see also Mark 6:45-51 and John 6:15-21).

When Christ had satisfied the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, they wanted to install Him as their political king. Christ then sent the people away and asked His disciples to get into their boat and cross over the Sea of Galilee to the western shore, to Bethsaida in Galilee, near Capernaum. He Himself went up on the mountain alone to pray. Christ's prayer was not a prayer of confession, because He was without sin. It was not a prayer for power from God, because He Himself was the holder of authority, who had been given all power in heaven and on earth. His prayer

was intercession for the disciples, that they might understand the meaning of His spiritual message and sovereignty over the hearts.

In this area, the Sea of Galilee was about 45 stadia wide (one stadion is an eighth of a mile or about a fifth of a kilometre). When the disciples had rowed about 25 stadia, a strong head-wind from the west rose against them. The Sea of Galilee is known for its sudden, violent storms. This storm was so strong that the disciples could not stand against it alone, in spite of their experience with the lake.

In the fourth watch of the night, Christ came to rescue His disciples. He had seen them from afar, knew what they needed and then came to their assistance. Is this not what happens to us? ``In all our affliction He is afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saves us" (Isaiah 63:9).

The Romans divided the night into four watches: evening, midnight, cock's crow and morning. It was now morning, three hours before sunrise. In the hours before sunrise, Christ came walking on the water to rescue His disciples from the danger of drowning in the water. The Sun of His Righteousness rose upon them with the light of His salvation.

God hears our prayers from afar. He understands our need and moves to help us. God is active in time and history, living in His heaven and on our earth. He carries out His will in heaven, because His angels serve Him and praise Him day and night, each of them having six wings to be directed to where God directs them. God either comes to us Himself, or represented by His angels, or through His people and His servants who stretch out their helping hand to us.

How strange, however, that the disciples thought that Christ was a ghost! They became even more afraid when they saw Him coming towards them. They were already frightened by the waves, and

now even more by the One who came to help them! But Christ dispelled both kinds of fear at once when He told them: ``Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (Matthew 14:27). At this, Peter said: ``Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (vs. 28). Christ commanded him to do so, and Peter came down out of the boat and walked on the surface of the water. But as soon as he changed his focus from Christ to the waters roaring around him, he began to sink. Peter then did what every believer must do: he cried out, ``Lord, save me!" (vs. 30). At once, Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him and said to him after having rescued him: ``O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" and when they boarded the boat together, the wind ceased (vs. 31,32).

This miracle is a double one: Christ calmed the sea for all His disciples, and made Peter walk on the water and saved him from drowning. This is what Christ does to us: He does not just work one miracle, but several, so many that we often forget the small miracles because we are so dazzled by the great ones! So let us say like David: ``Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" (Psalm 103:1).

Christ performed miracles on dry land and on water. He is Lord of the earth and the sea, able to work both here and there. There is no place where His powerful hand cannot reach. He fed the hungry. He stilled the stormy sea. Let us say to Him: ``The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:1,2). In these two miracles, we see how He fed them, and then how He lead them beside the still waters!

Let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The disciples:

a. They saw the miracle of calming the wind after a deep spiritual experience. The disciples had seen that their Saviour was able to feed ⑤ve thousand people with ⑤ve loaves and two ⑤sh. This is the heavenly table from which He satisfies His disciples and the needy people, with twelve baskets full of the remaining pieces.

Sometimes, people rely on their spiritual capabilities, thinking that they have learned much after a mighty spiritual experience! But even our greatest experiences do not mean that we are safe from the hardships of life, for the devil increases his attacks on us the more we accomplish in spiritual growth and stature. Therefore, the more we experience, the more let us see to it that we do not fall, and make our dependence on Him continuous. We do not have sufficient power within ourselves to meet our needs. Rather, our power depends on the power we receive from Him.

b. When the disciples set out on their trip, the wind was favourable and the water calm. On the middle of the lake, however, the wind became unfavourable: ``the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary" (vs. 24). The boat was neither able to return to where it came from, nor to continue its course towards the desired haven! This happens to us all the time, for God allows us to be tested in order to acquaint us with His person and to teach us to trust Him.

c. The efforts of the disciples continued for a considerable length of time, into the fourth watch of the night. ``Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea" (vs. 25).

A question arises here: Why did Christ leave His disciples out on the water?

We do not always understand the divine wisdom. We often ask

God, ``Why did You do this to us?" What we always need to do, though, is to submit to Him, because even if we do not understand His wisdom we do understand that He loves us.

d. The disciples did not recognise their teacher when He came to them. They thought He was a ghost, because their rescue came to them from where they did not expect it. They were terrified. ``And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, `It is a ghost!' and they cried out for fear" (vs. 26). God comes to our assistance through doors that we do not know or expect or have heard about. Sometimes the rescue that comes is so magnificent that we think it is a kind of mirage!

Even though the faithful learn the ways of God as they make progress in their faith, God's miraculous surprises and experiential teachings are new every morning. So, may God constantly give us the Spirit that makes us ready to learn and be utterly amazed.

e. The disciples cried out. It is good that a believer cries out in order to express that he is too weak and unable and lacking in wisdom and power to save himself. Then, when divine assistance comes, he will hear: ``Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

2. The one who is even more needy, namely Peter:

a. A strong confidence: ``And Peter answered Him and said, `Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water'" (vs. 28).

Peter was afraid like the other disciples. But he experienced more fear than they that day. He had strong confidence. He said: ``If it is You", not in order to express doubt, but to get more assurance. It was as if he were saying, ``I know that it is You. So command me to come to You." Peter asked Christ to direct His command to him ``command me" which proves that Peter is an obedient man.

Peter was distinguished from the other disciples by being faster than they, so they sometimes called him foolhardy. He was quick

in recognising Christ and in stating openly who Christ was. He threw himself into the lake in order to arrive at shore before the rest of the disciples so that he could meet Christ.

b. However, his strong confidence turned into a shaky one. ``When Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, `Lord, save me!'" (vs. 29,30). How often the Lord turns the ``water" which no one walks on into a firm, stable and solid road! But Peter shifted his focus from the Lord of the circumstances to the circumstances themselves. He looked away from the One who was able to help him in his own inability and looked at the enormous difficulties he was up against! When we change our focus from the Problem-Solver to the problems themselves, we sink, because the problem is bigger than we are and there is nothing within us which can make us victorious against it.

When you confess your sins to God, do not concentrate on your sins, but on Him who forgives sin. The more we rebuke ourselves for sinning, the more we think about them and the more negative our thinking becomes, the more we lose confidence in ourselves. When, however, we think about Him who forgives sin, Him who made the atonement on the cross, the Loving One who accepts us, we change our focus from the problem to the Saviour.

In spite of Peter's ability to swim well, he almost drowned. Perhaps the fear that had seized him paralyzed his natural strength. Fear usually paralyses our strength and talents given to us by God. But we need Him who is above nature, because our natural faculties are ineffective and limited.

c. Peter's confident request: ``Lord, save me!" (vs. 30): This is a very short prayer, but it is profound. It confessed weakness, but expressed belief in the Saviour. The confidence by which he had said, ``Command me to come to You" returned to Peter. The

shaken, fearing confidence had been strengthened and cried out again because it had confidence in Him who answers prayer. The quick answer came: Christ stretched out His mighty, strong and saving hand and caught him.

We must know that our lifebuoy is confidence in the love of Christ our Saviour. The Gospel does not say: "The disciple who loved Jesus", but: "The disciple whom Jesus loved." Our love for Him is shaky and weak. We cannot rely on our trembling hand which catches His. We can only rely on Christ's hand which catches ours. This is the mighty strength, for we say: "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears" (Psalm 18:6).

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. The praying Christ:

This miracle begins with Christ praying on the mountain.

He did not ask for forgiveness, nor for strength. But, because He is one with the Father, He prayed for the disciples, as He said: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). Thus Christ prayed for the twelve and for those who would believe through their word. He always lifts us up in intercession. Only His intercession is acceptable, because all mankind is sinful and in need of an intercessor. Christ, on the other hand, is the one and only perfect One. He only is worthy of being an intercessor, because He is not in need of anyone to intercede for Him. Moreover, He can do what Job asked for, namely lay His hand on God and us (Job 9:33). For His human nature as a perfect human being makes Him lay His hand on us: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same" (Hebrews 2:14). So Christ is flesh and blood just like us for He is perfect in His humanity, born of the holy virgin Mary, died on the cross and buried. At the

same time He is perfect God. He came to our earth, being pre-existent before His birth, ``born, not created" ``begotten, not made". After His crucifixion and burial, He rose from the grave. The grave cannot keep life captive when it is the Lord and Master of life, the One through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made that was made. This perfect human being lays His hand on us, and this perfect God lays my hand in God's hand in order to effect reconciliation. Thus, the words of the Gospel come true: ``God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

2. The tender Christ:

From the mountain, in the dark of night, Christ saw His disciples in agony on the lake (Mark 6:48). The eyes of love pierced the curtains of darkness, for He is the One who knows the hidden things. It took no time for Him to move from the mountain to the middle of the lake, walking on the water. For the Lord said: ``I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:7,8).

3. The mighty Christ:

He is the Lord who walks on the water: ``He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8).

4. The unhurried Christ:

He came in the fourth watch of the night. Many believers complain about God because they think He leaves them in the midst of trouble. However, God's patience forms their lives and teaches them through their trials. He does not come according to our timing, but according to His own wise timing, the timing of the Master, the timing of the Father. He is like a life guard: When someone is about to drown, he leaves the poor person for a few

well-calculated seconds until the person is ready to submit. Then he carries him or her to the saving shore.

Once Christ calmed the storm while He was with the disciples in the small boat. This time He was not with them. He wanted to teach them that even though He was absent from them in the body, He was with them in His Spirit. The first time He saved them, they saw Him calm the storm with their own eyes. The second time, however, they saw Him coming from far away. ``Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

It is not so important that you see Him. What is important is that He sees you. It is not so important that you touch Him. What is important is that He touches you. Then you will see and touch Him when He fills your heart with peace and joy.

5. Christ, the One who waits for the call:

Christ tried to pass by the boat: ``He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by" (Mark 6:48), because He wanted to hear the disciples ask to be rescued. He did the same thing with the two disciples at Emmaus, in order that they might extend an invitation to Him: ``Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther" (Luke 24:28). Here we see the exaltedness of Christ's salvation. We see human responsibility and divine work: Man is responsible for inviting Christ to enter the heart, and God is responsible for entering: ``Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

6. The encouraging Christ:

The Lord always encourages His children, saying, ``It is I; do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). He wants them to be always secure: ``Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). This is because what the world can give is limited and the peace it can give is mixed with

anxiety. The peace of the Lord is different, for it is pure and clear. This is what caught Peter's hand: ``Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him" (vs. 31). Jesus did not reproach the weak faith of His disciple until after He has lifted Him out of the heaving sea! He did not say to him, ``Why did you come to Me?" Peter had the right to come to the Lord. He said to him, ``O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (vs. 30). The believer has a right to request from God, but not to doubt God's love.

``Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, when the sea of our life is disturbed, and when we lose control over our destiny, Christ comes to us. The Lord of nature comes to us walking on the waves to calm them down, for even the waves submit themselves under His feet. We refuge with You, depend on You in order to ®nd deep security inside us and get disturbed no more, however the sea of life may rage. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What did Christ pray for on the mountain?
2. What does ``the last watch" mean?
3. Why did the disciples think that Christ coming to them walking on the water was a ghost?
4. We learn two things for Peter's request, ``Command me to come to you on the water." Mention them.
5. What do we learn from Christ's walking on the water?
6. What do we learn from the word, ``He wanted to pass them by"?
7. Mention a spiritual experience where you were allowed to do something similar to Peter walking on the water.

THE EIGHTEENTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE PHOENICIAN WOMAN'S DAUGHTER

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession." ²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." ²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. ²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matthew 15:21-28, see also in Mark 7:24-30).

Christ welcomed all people, individuals as well as groups. Once, He had a man-to-man conversation with a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus, where He spoke to him about being born again. On another occasion, He had an individual conversation with a fallen Samaritan woman, offering her living water (John 3,4).

Christ healed both Jews and Gentiles. He healed the centurion's servant (Matthew 8) as well as the son of the nobleman (John 4).

The miracle which we will consider now is the healing of a Gentile woman's daughter, who was demon-possessed. Her mother came to Christ asking Him to heal her. The misery of the daughter was also the mother's misery.

Matthew describes the woman as a "Canaanite". Mark stated that she was a Gentile, not Jewish. He also describes her as being

``Syro-Phoenician" because the Romans considered her country as belonging to the province of Syria.

The Phoenician woman had already heard about Christ (Matthew 4:24), for the sweet fragrance cannot be concealed. She came to Him, but Christ rebuffed her. This miracle raises several questions, because the conversation Christ had with this mother was different from His conversations with other people who asked Him for healing or blessing. We shall gather from our meditation on this miracle that Christ's objective is always to show His love to mankind in His words and His works, even though it may seem from His words that He does not love us sufficiently and clearly.

It appears in this miracle that Christ hesitated in healing the Canaanite woman's daughter. We get this impression, first of all, because He did not answer her. Secondly, when His disciples told Him, ``Send her away, for she cries out after us" (vs. 23, meaning that Christ should heal the daughter in order that she might leave them alone), He answered, ``I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vs. 24).

When He entered the house, the woman followed Him, worshiped Him and asked Him to heal her daughter. Then He gave her an answer, which strikes us as it must have struck her. He said, ``It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (vs. 26). This is an astonishing attitude, one which we are not used to from Christ. We have seen Him before meeting many different kinds of people and healing them. The question suggests itself strongly why Christ answered her and the disciples in this way. There must be a reason that made Him react this way.

This woman had heard that Christ healed all sickness, so she decided to ask Him to heal her daughter. When He answered her in a way she did not expect, even though He had already answered someone before her like that, she did not despair. She was determined not to go back until she had obtained healing

from Him for her daughter. She entered the house after Him, worshipped Him and repeated her request. He, then, granted her petition because she persisted in asking for what was in her heart. Moreover, she was praised by Christ for her faith.

In this miracle, let us consider:

1. The woman who needs and the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The Phoenician girl:

She was a lunatic, possessed by an evil spirit (Mark 7:25). Satan destroys the mind of those who submit themselves to him. To illustrate this, there is a story about two merchants who each had his own shop. One of them was successful, whereas the other was not, so he hated his successful neighbour. The hateful man plotted his neighbour's downfall by sending someone who changed the prices of his wares, putting a high price on the cheap goods and a cheap price on the expensive goods. The successful neighbour incurred a huge loss before he discovered the trick! The devil plays the same trick on us. He puts a high price on trifles and a trifling price on the valuable things so that we run after transitory things and forget that which endures to everlasting life! There are people who value themselves according to what treasures they have, which will perish one day, but the wise will say, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 1:21), "as poor, yet making many rich" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

The devil had come to dwell in this poor girl and taken her reason away. The devil still continues to lead people astray and destroy their sound, reasonable and logical way of thinking. Satan turns things upside down, thereby making them run after trifles and neglect what is more important. They do this even though the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,

who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45,46).

2. The mother who requested:

a. The mother believed with a strong, resolute faith (vs. 28). The Holy Spirit must have dealt with her in such a way that He opened her heart to know that whatever she needed, she could find with Christ. This great faith was so persistent that it would get what it wanted and not return empty-handed. She knew that He was rich in power, in love and generous in giving and distributing. When she saw His face, she understood that all she had heard about Him was true. He would most certainly give her what she needed. Christ praised her for this faith saying, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire" (Matthew 15:28). Christ had not praised anyone else's faith before, except that of the centurion (Matthew 8:10). The gospels do not mention that He praised the faith of anyone but these two, who were Gentiles!

She had this faith in spite of her pagan background. Her family had worshipped idols, but she was expecting the coming Saviour. She called Him, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!" thereby requesting to belong to Him. She understood that salvation was by Him and in Him, and that He was the expected Messiah.

She believed in spite of the difficult position Christ put her into. When she called Him, He did not answer her. When the disciples intervened in order that He might grant her what she requested, He refused. Then came the answer which she did not expect: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (Matthew 15:26). In spite of that, she persisted believing that she would obtain healing from Him for her daughter. St. John Chrysostom said: "She did not get a word of encouragement from the WORD. The source of compassion was closed. The physician held back the cure." However, she decided to struggle

until she won. She struggled with Christ until she won by His grace, since she had been victorious over herself and her own pride. The lips of faith will not stop asking, even if Christ closes His mouth and ear to the one who has that faith, even if the disciples behave wrongly. "Send her away, for she cries out after us" (vs. 23) and even if the one having the faith thinks that the blessing is for the few and that he is unworthy of it. The Phoenician woman does not stop requesting in spite of all that.

Determined faith was what the Phoenician woman had learned from the Holy Spirit. This is the faith which knocks at the door and does not stop doing so until the owner of the house wakes up, even though it is after midnight, to give the help requested (Luke 11:8). This is the faith which struggles with the angel like Jacob and prays until it gets the blessing (Genesis 32:24-32). It is the struggle of the humble one asking for mercy (Hosea 12:3,4).

The struggle of the Phoenician woman was the struggle of obedience. She fulfilled Paul's words: "To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Colossians 1:29). Here we see the power of the Lord in the weak heart to struggle with Christ and say to Him, "True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table" (vs. 28).

b. The mother humbled herself. This determined woman was humble. She did not come to Christ struggling, but in prayer and submission. She agreed with what Christ told her. She said, "True, Lord" (vs. 27), even though His words were hurtful to her. She searched for the truth in what Christ said, and answered, "yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table", as if saying to Him, "Your crumbs, Lord, even the least of the little you have, are enough to drive out the demon from my daughter. The miracle You can work in my daughter is simple in comparison with what You have worked among the Jews, so the

crumbs from your table are enough for me." The crumbs are the pieces cut from the loaves and used for cleaning the hands from oily foods after eating, then thrown to the pet dogs. It is as if she is saying to Him: "If your crumbs are so satisfying, how satisfying your bread must be!" The first Patriarch of Venice, Lawrence Justinian prayed this prayer when he was on the verge of death: "Who am I, O Lord, that I should sit at Your table in Your kingdom and see the glory of the Holy Trinity! It is enough to sit at the feet of the saints. The crumbs falling from your table are enough to satisfy my soul." This was surely a humble man.

c. The mother got what she requested. She took the kingdom by force "and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). She took the kingdom by the struggle of humility and the request of the faith which does not become weary. Martin Luther said, "The Phoenician woman had taken the sword from Christ's hand and fought Him with His own word, saying, "True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." So she obtained the answer of praise from Him: "O woman, great is your faith!" (vs. 28). She obtained the grace which was hidden behind Christ's refusal of her request. Martin Luther also said, "Agree with God in everything He says, in His point of view. Do not stop praying until you win like the Phoenician woman, and turn all the evidence against you into cases in your favor, so that you obtain whatever blessing Christ has." She won the victory from Christ and His grace and His Holy Spirit.

The Phoenician woman got what she asked for because she entered the ambience of grace, the ambience of the heavenly table, even though she was under it with the dogs eating the crumbs. She had the feelings of the lost son, who decided to say to his father, "Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:19). She had asked for the crumbs from the Lord's generosity, and walked away speaking about His mercy.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

We ask ourselves: why did Christ refuse to talk to the Phoenician woman when He had talked to the Samaritan woman? Why did He heal the sick man at the pool without being asked, saying: ``Do you want to be made whole?" (John 5:6) when He refused to perform this miracle? Why did He go forth to the many sick people offering them physical and spiritual healing? And why did He oppose the Phoenician woman, so unexpected both to the woman and to us? There must be a reason for that.

1. Christ was only severe with the Phoenician woman in words:

This was like Joseph's severity with his brothers when they came to him from the land of Canaan. Joseph dealt severely with his brothers in spite of his strong love for them. ``Joseph saw his brothers and recognised them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them... And said to them, `You are spies!'" (Genesis. 42:7-9). But then ``He turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes" (vs. 24), and then he gave them the grain and paid its price, and gave back to them what they had paid, putting it in their sacks! Thus Joseph was making earlier prophecies come true, as he was experiencing the repentance of his brothers and their love for one another. Christ acted with this Phoenician woman similarly to the way Joseph acted with his brothers.

2. In order to understand the words of a person, we need to look at his face when he is speaking:

We need to see the features of Christ's face when He said to the Phoenician woman, ``It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." If Christ's face had been stern, unsympathetic or tense when He was speaking these words, she would have been content with that and returned. However, His features must have been reflecting sympathy and tenderness,

which encouraged her, and the affront did not frustrate her sound thinking. So that which she did not expect to hear from Him and what she saw in the traits of His face, stirred her mind and her heart to say to Him, ``Yes, Lord, I agree with what You are saying, and I base my request on what You have said. Give me the crumbs, and that will be enough for me." Let us not forget that after He had spoken about the dogs, Christ said, ``O woman" to her (vs. 28). This is a tender word, which He had used to address His mother with before (John 2:4).

In order to understand Christ we need to see His face and in order to see His face, we must find ourselves in His presence, bow down and worship Him in all humility, pray to Him, and then go forth from our encounter with him full of confidence, comfort, reassurance and joy, waiting faithfully for Him to act.

There are two reasons for Christ's strange way of answering the woman which only appears to be severe.

The first reason: Christ shook the Phoenician woman's faith because He knew that it was strong and steadfast. If her faith had been weak, He would never have spoken to her in this way. ``God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Christ gave her a test according to the strength of her faith.

God does not tempt us beyond what we are able. Our temptations will never be too much for us to bear. Let us rest assured and calm because we do have a source of power which we have not tapped into yet. We do have a supply of grace which we have not yet spent. There is an abundance of great faith by which God supports every believer, ``In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter

1:6,7). Christ taught the Phoenician woman, as He teaches us, first of all to pray at all times without getting tired and without despairing. Secondly, He taught her, as He teaches us, that there is no doubt that the answer will come.

The second reason: Christ wanted to teach His disciples a lesson.

They were used to regard the Gentiles as dogs, so He wanted to change their view. It is as if He is telling them by this miracle, ``You do not respect the Gentiles, but there are those among them who will believe with a faith the like of which is not found in all of Israel." Peter would come to learn not to say that anyone or anything is unclean and would carry the good news to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Of course, the preaching began among the Jews, but the goal was that it should go out to all the world. Paul said: ``Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: `For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.' And again he says: `Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!' And again: `Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!' And again, Isaiah says: `There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope'" (Romans 15:8-12). So the blessing is for Jews and Gentiles alike. And when Simeon carried the infant Jesus (Luke 2:29-32), he said that He was salvation to Israel and a light to the Gentiles. Christ also said about Himself that He was the Good Shepherd, who had other sheep which were not of this fold, ``them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Christ began with the lost sheep of the house of Israel, in order that they might be the beginning of the Church, which would eventually include all peoples (Matthew 13:31,32).

We wish that everyone would hear from the Lord: ``Great is your

faith." May the Lord give us the faith of expectation and trust, the faith that receives.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, when we gaze upon the loving countenance of Christ, we realise that He is love incarnate. Teach us to continue asking, being certain that the distress is bound to pass away, and the cloud is bound to disperse. For You have the bread of the children, and unto you we rush for succor. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you explain that the mother is described as a Canaanite, a Phoenician, a Gentile and a Syrian?
2. Why did the disciples ask Christ to send away the mother?
3. What are the crumbs?
4. How does the devil attack us with demons?
5. How did the Phoenician woman show her faith, and how did she show her humility?
6. When Christ said, "And throw it to the little dogs" there was a reason for it related to the Phoenician woman. What was the reason?
7. When Christ said, "Throw it to the little dogs" there was a reason for it related to the disciples. What was the reason?

THE NINETEENTH MIRACLE

THE GRADUAL HEALING OF A BLIND MAN

²² They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ``Do you see anything?'' **²⁴ He looked up and said, ``I see people; they look like trees walking around.''** **²⁵ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, ``Don't go into the village" (Mark 8:22-26).**

We have got used to Christ healing the sick immediately and perfectly at once. This miracle, however, is the only one where Christ healed in two stages. For when Christ laid His hand on the eyes of the blind man in Bethsaida, ``He looked up and said, `I see men like trees, walking!' (vs. 24). Christ then laid His hand on the man's eyes a second time and made him look up again. He, then, was restored to full health and saw everyone clearly.

The town of Bethsaida had seen many of Christ's miracles. Many there had their spiritual eyes opened to know the Saviour. There, some experienced a literal healing of their eyes so that they could see. Bethsaida is a town built on both sides of the Sea of Galilee, where the Jordan River flows into it. It is the town of Andrew, who found Christ. Peter lived there, whom his brother Andrew led to Christ. Philip lived there, Christ's disciple, who knew the Messiah and then called Nathanael and told him, ``Come and see the Messiah."

The blind man who received the gradual healing did not come to Christ on his own. His friends led him to Christ and specified how Christ should heal him, namely by touching him. Christ honoured

their faith, but not in the way they had sketched out for Him. Instead, He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the town to be alone with him. There He spit on his eyes and put His hands on them twice. Then, all of a sudden, his eyes were restored and he could see everyone clearly.

In this miracle, let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The friends and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The blind man did not come to Christ of his own accord:

His friends brought him to Christ (vs. 22). People come to Christ in many ways. Some come of their own free will because they feel a spiritual hunger and thirst. They seek to be satisfied and quenched. Others do not understand what their real need is. Somebody else brings them, as it happened with the blind man.

We have seen miracles where Christ found the sick person, as for instance the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5). There are other instances in which the sick person was carried to Christ, as with the paralyzed man (Mark 2). Then, there are miracles where the sick person is led to Christ, as we see here.

2. The only one who appeared to be healed gradually:

a. The reason was that he lacked enthusiasm. His friends had to bring him. We observe that he did not start a conversation with Christ. He only answered a question. When Christ put his hand on his eyes the first time, He asked him if he saw anything. The blind man just answered, "I see men like trees, walking" (vs. 24). He showed no enthusiasm for obtaining a greater blessing. He was very different from the blind man who shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

But when Christ laid his hands on this blind man a second time ``he was restored and saw everyone clearly" (vs. 24). Nevertheless, he did not show his joy sufficiently, neither did he rush to talk about the miracle Christ had worked with him. He was neither dazzled, nor enthusiastic for anything! Often, we get more from Christ's hands than we ask for or think, but we lack the power to thank Him and the push of enthusiasm to talk about how much the Lord has done for us and how merciful He has been to us, as if the grace He has shown towards us were something He is bound and obliged to do!

b. Because of his lack of knowledge: Other miracles had been performed in Bethsaida, but it seems that he had not heard about them. His friends, though, had heard about them, so they took him with them and brought him to the Saviour, whom he had not heard about. This ignorance, however, did not prevent the loving Christ from twice laying His hand on this blind, ignorant man, in order to give him his full eyesight. How many miserable sinners ``are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)!

c. Because of lack of faith: His lack of enthusiasm made him lack interest in knowledge, and his lack of knowledge made him lack faith, for ``faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

3. The gradual healing of the man brought him into a better situation:

When he saw people like trees, walking, he was in need of a clearer vision. Christ did not leave him until he had obtained that.

Some of us get a little blessing and are satisfied with that; but the Lord wants to give us more. When one of the Jewish scribes came to Christ and asked what was the first and most important commandment, Christ told him that it was to love God and one's neighbours. He answered, ``Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to

love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:32,33). From his answer, we see that he learned a new spiritual lesson. The Jews used to regard sacrifices and burnt offerings as more important than anything else. However, what he had learned was not sufficient for his salvation, for Christ told him, ``You are not far from the kingdom of God." Not being far from the kingdom is similar to seeing ``people like trees, walking." The lawyer was not far away, but he was not yet inside the kingdom. He needed to take another step which would bring him into the kingdom of God and give him the full blessing. The desire of Christ is to bestow the full blessing on you. Do not stop where you have arrived.

II. THE FRIENDS AND THE MIRACLE

1. The friends brought the blind man to Christ:

a. This shows their mercy towards the blind man: They took pity on someone who could not see nor know, in such a way that their sympathy was turned from sentiments into action. ``Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

b. It also shows faith in Christ's power: Christ said, ``I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). They brought the blind man along, fully confident that Christ was able to heal him.

c. Furthermore, it shows wisdom: ``He who wins souls, is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). The greatest thing you can do is to reach the beginning of wisdom, which is to fear God, and then to lead others to fear God. Heaven rejoices at one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7,10), for the one who brings a sinner back from the error of his way, saves a soul from death and covers a multitude of sins (James 5:20).

When the eyes of the blind man were opened and his eyesight became clear, his friends experienced perfect joy!

2. The friends of the blind man asked Jesus to heal the blind man in the way they specified, by touching him:

Often because of our zeal and love for a person, we order the Lord to do for him what we specify. The friends asked Christ to heal the blind man in a certain way. What we really need, though, is to learn the prayer of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane: ``Not what I will, but what You will." We must not dictate the Lord how to act and care for us. However, the Lord disregarded their specifications and honoured their faith, healing the blind man in His own way.

Christ took the blind man far away from his friends, outside the village. There He performed the healing miracle. He touched him and blessed him not only once, but twice. He showered him doubly with grace. The Lord loves the disabled person more than the friends who brought him did. The gifts of the Lord to this soul were greater than the expectations of those who asked on his behalf.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. ``He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town" (vs. 23).

He wanted to be alone with him. He gave him more time. Sometimes, the Lord takes us away from our friends and our worldly concerns and isolates us from those whom we know, in order that we might spend more time with Him. This is what He did with the blind man. He isolated him from his community, his past and his idol-worship!

When the Lord appeared to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, He threw him to the ground. Then Saul was led to the place where he met one who prayed for him. The Lord opened his eyes and his heart. After that, Saul withdrew to the desert to be

alone with the Lord, in order to re-evaluate everything he had learned before. When he read the Torah in a new light, he came to know that its prophecies had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. To deepen his knowledge of Christ, to whom he was going to bear witness, he studied and prayed more and more. Someone who speaks about God must first speak with God and enjoy Him. Then he can go out to bear witness to Him.

2. He spit on his eyes and put His hands on him (vs. 23).
The Lord took an ordinary thing and did something extraordinary with it! Christ clothed the natural with the supernatural! Before, He had taken the rainbow, which appeared after the flood, and made it the sign of a covenant with mankind that He would never again drown the earth with a flood (Genesis 9:12). He took circumcision, which was practised in some Middle Eastern countries, and made it the sign of a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:10). He took the bread and the cup and made them a sign of the new covenant (Matthew 26:26-29). Moreover, He took five loaves of bread and two fish to feed five thousand (John 6:1-14). Therefore, we need to present all that we are and have to Him, including the first fruits of our labour, in order that He may turn these ordinary things into extraordinary blessings.

3. Christ healed the blind man gradually:
He did not leave him until He had completed his healing. He does not leave us until He has completed our salvation, for He is the beginning and the completion of our faith. We can say with Paul the apostle, ``When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:11,12). The Lord's love introduces us to the most profound depths of the blessed knowledge of Him, which saves us and liberates us eternally.

4. Christ commanded the blind man not to enter the town:

The blind man's faith was weak. His enthusiasm was at zero level. So what could he possibly tell his townspeople?

Was it not better that he stayed out of town for a while to ponder how much the Lord had done for him and how much mercy He had shown him, before he went to proclaim it, or before the townspeople began to ask him about it?

How we need to know and love Christ more in order to become better at speaking about Him!

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for Christ who opened the blind man's eyes, and was so patient with him until he saw everybody clearly. You are patient with us until our insight is open and we see Your uplifted person Your straight path. Then we would follow You, announcing the debt we owe to the One who brought us from darkness to His wonderful light. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Mention one whose heart was opened to Christ in Bethsaida, and one whose eyes were opened there.
2. Mention a healing miracle where Christ went to the sick person, and give the Bible reference.
3. Why was the blind man of Bethsaida so unenthusiastic about everything?
4. What is the point of similarity between the scribe mentioned in Mark chapter 12 and the blind man of Bethsaida?
5. The friends of the blind man showed three things by how they acted; mention them.

6. Mention three ordinary things which Christ turned into extraordinary things.
7. Why did Christ command the blind man not to enter the town after he had been healed?

THE TWENTIETH MIRACLE

THE COIN FOUND IN THE MOUTH OF A FISH

²⁴After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" ²⁵"Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes, from their own sons or from others?" ²⁶"From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. ²⁷"But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours" (Matthew 17:24-27).

St. Matthew is the only evangelist who mentioned this miracle. As we know, he wrote his version of the good news to Jewish believers, in order to confirm the good news to them that Christ was God revealed in the flesh, that He was the Saviour who had come to fulfil all the demands of the Old Testament, and that He was the Messiah whom the Jewish people were expecting.

This miracle shows us Christ's nature as perfect man and perfect God. As man, He obeyed the Law of the Old Testament and the requirements of the Law of Moses. Thus, He paid the tax levied on the ordinary Jewish citizen, atoning for Himself, even though He was not forced to pay it because He is the Son. However, He subjected Himself to the Law, even though He was the Lord Himself. He needed money, even though He had all the power. He revealed His divinity when He performed the miracle which showed His authority over the dry land as well as the sea, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Christ arrived at Capernaum, the town where He lived. At the time the annual temple tax was collected. It was half a silver shekel (six grammes). Half a shekel equalled two drachmas at the time of Christ. Every Jew who had reached the age of twenty had to pay this amount as a sacrifice and atonement for himself (Exodus 30:11-16, 2 Chronicles 24:6,9).

In all the lands where the Jews were dispersed, this tax was collected in chests, which were carried to Jerusalem by entrusted persons. When Christ was asked to pay it, He did so, both for Himself and for Peter. He performed this miracle to pay the tax, even though He was exempt.

Let us consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

Superficially seen, Christ appears to be the needy person, whereas in fact it is Peter, who needs to pay the compulsory temple tax. On his way to paying it, he had to learn three spiritual lessons.

1. He needed to know what it means that Christ is the Son of God:

As God's Son He did not have to pay that tax. When Christ asked His disciples, ``Who do men say that I am?" Peter answered Him: ``You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Christ said to him, ``Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-17). Peter, the one who made this declaration, does not appear to have known all the dimensions of meaning contained in his own words. He needed the help of the Holy Spirit to get a deeper understanding of them.

Likewise, Peter was not aware of all the implications of Christ's

name: ``the Son of God." This name, which Peter himself knew and had declared, meant that Christ was ``the Lord of the Temple", who does not need to pay the temple tax!

When the tax-collectors asked Peter, ``Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" (vs. 24) he answered in the affirmative without referring to Christ. He was confident that his pious Teacher carried out all the demands of the Law, and when he returned to the house, Jesus took the initiative and asked him, ``What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their own sons or from strangers?" (i.e. from those outside their own clan, vs. 25). The natural answer was that they would take it from the strangers, not from their own sons. Therefore, Christ told Peter, ``Then the sons are free" (vs. 26). This is tantamount to saying, ``I do not pay the tax, for you yourself have told Me, `You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

God gave Moses instructions for building the Tabernacle. Solomon as well received specifications according to which he built his temple. This temple was destroyed and rebuilt according to the same specifications. However, there is a great difference between the Son, the Master of the temple, and the one who serves there! ``For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:4-6).

Christ is the temple and the Lord of the temple, whereas Moses was the servant of the temple. Therefore Christ is greater than Moses!

2. Peter needed to know that Christ is God's temple and therefore should not pay the tax:

The tax was paid to the temple. Christ is the temple, so how can He pay a tax to Himself? Christ declared that He Himself was God's temple when He said: `` `Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, `It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:19-22). In fact, they did destroy Him on the cross, and He did rise after three days.

``For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

``And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

3. Peter needed to grasp the meaning of Christ being the ransom:

As thus He should not pay the tax. The required tax was half a shekel as an offering to God for expiation and for meeting the needs of the temple ministry. The tax was collected from the children of Israel as a ``ransom of atonement". As this tax was a ransom to the Lord, Christ did not need to pay it, because He is the Saviour, the Redeemer and the One who atones for us.

God said, ``Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). So every soul is His by creation, since He is the Creator. It is also His by redemption, since He is the Redeemer. By the gifts of grace He grants the new life, since He is the Saviour. He is the rescue and the salvation from certain death and damnation. Christ as the One who redeems, does not pay ransom for Himself.

After Peter had declared Christ to be the Son of God, Christ declared that He was coming to redeem and atone: ``From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21). ``Then Jesus said to His disciples, `If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24).

The Lord Jesus is the One who went into the Holy of Holies once for all with the sacrifice of Himself, thereby bringing about eternal redemption, so that the sacrifice does not have to be repeated year after year.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ's wonderful and marvellous love:

a. This love appeared to Peter and those who collected the tax. In spite of the fact that He did not have to pay the tax, He paid it for Himself and for Peter in order not to disappoint him. Often we commit ourselves to serve Christ in a way which is beyond our powers, but Christ honours our faith and gives us according to His riches and His love.

b. Christ could very well have entered into a discussion with the tax-collectors in order to prove that He was exempt from paying the tax. However, He did not want them to stumble nor to cause them to think that He had broken the law. They could not yet understand the meaning of redemption and His divine Sonship. No one can say that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit had not been poured out yet, because Christ had not been glorified yet (John 7:39). Here we see Christ's love and tenderness towards the tax-collectors.

2. Christ, the All-Knowing:

a. When Peter entered the house, Jesus took the initiative and

asked him: ``From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their own sons or from strangers?" (vs. 25) for He knew what Peter had been talking to the tax-collectors about. Everything is laid bare and open before Him. He knows the questions and objections which face us, to which we have no answer. He knows our emotional, physical and spiritual needs.

b. Christ told Peter that he would find exactly the amount needed to pay the tax for Himself and Peter in the mouth of the first fish he would catch. This is not mere knowledge, but knowledge with authority! The specified fish came to the very place where Peter would throw out his fishing hook, and at the very minute he did it. When the fish had been caught on the hook, the coin did not fall out of its mouth, but remained there safely until Peter had landed the fish!

3. Christ declared the authority of the Son:

The angel declared to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God: ``Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son... He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest... That Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31,32,35).

The Father Himself declared the same at Christ's baptism in the Jordan River. He said, ``This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Christ declared it, too, at the time of His visit to the temple as a twelve-year old, saying, ``I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49). He declared it again when He cleansed the temple the first time. He told the people who were selling doves, ``Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" (John 2:16).

Christ made a distinction between His Sonship to God and ours. His is an original Sonship. On the other hand, the sonship of the disciples to God is acquired as they are adopted by His grace. Christ's Sonship is pre-existent before all ages whereas our

sonship is granted to us the day we commit our lives to Him and are born again. Christ said to Peter, ``You will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you" (vs. 27). He did not say, ``Give it to them for us." In another situation, He said, ``I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). He did not say, ``To our God." We see here the Redeemer and the redeemed, the Saviour and the saved.

How informative is the Father's statement to the Son in the second psalm! He said, ``You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Psalm 2:7). Jesus did not become the Father's Son after He was born. He was always the Son. In the fulness of time He was born of the virgin Mary. His Sonship preceded His birth. As humans our sonship begins after we are born. As for Jesus, His Sonship to God was from eternity; before the miraculous virgin birth.

God wants to teach us a lesson that we should cast ourselves entirely upon Him and thus become spiritually rich. When we lay down ourselves before Him in all our weakness He will perfect what is lacking and strengthen our weakness and make us perfect by His grace. This is because the Lord wants to teach us that He has the authority and the final solution to all the problems which seem endless to us. He accounts for the expenses and removes the impediments to expanding His kingdom and spreading His word, and strengthens His children's weaknesses.

4. He revealed Himself to be the Lord of nature:

When Christ paid the tax by a miracle He revealed that He, submitting to the Law, at the same time is the Lord of nature. This miracle met the need and declared the Lord's authority as well. Christ cut Peter down to size when he was confronted with his problem. Often we need to remember that without Christ we can do nothing, but that we can do all things in Christ who strengthens

us (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). Even though we amount to little in front of the problem, we are able to solve it by Christ's grace.

The Lord caused Peter's fishing hook to catch the required fish in the first attempt. And when he took the coin from its mouth, it proved to be of the exact value needed, so he took it to pay for the needs of the temple.

The Lord puts a hook in the devil's mouth in order to fish out everyone whom He has chosen to take up the ministry of His temple. Then He makes the believer whom the Lord's fishing-hook has caught a fisher of men.

Peter was hidden like the coin in the fish's mouth. Christ took him out and used him to fish men when He told him and the other disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Thus, He gave his life a greater and deeper meaning, and fulfilled in him the heavenly purpose for his life.

It should be the same with you.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, even the fish that swims in the waters bring Your purposes to fulfillment, and the world carries out Your plans. You pay our debts from where we do not know, and cover all our needs.

Teach us to yield completely to You, and give Your commands absolute obedience, so that Your good purpose may be accomplished in our lives. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Mention and explain all the three lessons Christ wanted to teach Peter by this miracle.
2. Christ revealed His love towards Peter in this miracle how?

3. Christ revealed His love towards the collectors of the temple tax how?
4. What do you learn from the fact that Peter caught the right fish at the first attempt?
5. In what way was Peter like the coin in the fish's mouth, and what did Christ do with him?

THE TWENTY-FIRST MIRACLE

THE ONE WHO GAVE THANKS

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance. ¹³And called out in a loud voice, ``Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, ``Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, ``Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, ``Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:11-19).

This miracle happened in a village between Samaria and Galilee. Its name is not mentioned in the Gospel. Christ healed ten lepers there who were sitting outside the walls of the little, but populous village, begging from people. When they heard that Christ was coming, they got up to welcome Him from a distance. The law ordered lepers to stand at a distance of at least fifty meters from a healthy person. These sick people raised their voices in order that Christ, the Healer, might hear them across this distance.

The Old Testament Law required that a leper must tear his clothes, keep his head uncovered, cover his moustache and live outside the town. Furthermore, if someone approached him, he had to shout ``Unclean! Unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45). People used to think that a leper was under God's wrath and therefore struck by this cursed, incurable illness, which made his extremities fall off gradually until he died. A leper was without hope that he would ever be well again. Therefore, these ten lepers were standing at a distance calling out and begging for mercy from Christ.

Christ did not touch these ten as He had done with others, but gave them an order which seems strange: ``Go, show yourselves to the priests" (vs. 14). This meant that they would be healed while they were on their way to Jerusalem, for if a sick person had not obtained healing, he would not go to the priests in Jerusalem in order to get the health certificate with which he can return to live normally among other people and offer the required sacrifice.

When Christ issued His order to the ten men, they carried it out without experiencing any change in their bodies, for they had not yet obtained actual healing. However, on Christ's word, they set out for Jerusalem. Instead of saying, ``What is the use of travelling before we are healed?" they began a long journey, relying on His word. They did that because they were trusting and convinced by faith that something would happen which had not yet happened. For faith sees what others do not see! The ten were all healed, but only one of them, the Samaritan, returned to give thanks. He fell down on his face at Christ's feet. Christ said to him, ``Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well" (vs. 19). He obtained the spiritual as well as the physical blessing.

Let us consider in this miracle:

1. The ones in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. The ten lepers:

They were all in need of healing from Christ, as they all shared the same disease. They were not worthy of approaching Christ, so they stood at a distance from Him. This is a situation similar to that of sinners in need of repentance.

We can see several aspects of similarity between leprosy and sin:

a. Sin befalls man after he has been created as perfect by God. Leprosy is a stranger to perfect health. God created men good,

but they sought out many schemes against God's will (Ecclesiastes 7:29). ``All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

b. Both are hereditary and they become more apparent with age. Leprosy starts as something small. With the passing of days, it develops into a disease that eventually kills its victim. Likewise, sin begins in us as something small. Satan never begins by tempting us with a grievous sin. If he begins with it, we would refuse. But when he begins with small sins, we tend to accept them. If we do, we go on to doing greater sins, until we are at last fettered by the chains of sin, enslaved and utterly destroyed.

c. They both result in abominable impurity, which separates us from God's congregation. The effect of leprosy is similar to the effect of sin. Impurity makes the man who was once clean isolate himself from the believers. Sin makes man say to the Lord, ``Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways" (Job 21:14).

d. There is no healing for either, except by God and Him alone! This cursed disease is like sin in that it is impossible to attain healing for it through a human physician. It can only happen through divine intervention. Naaman the Syrian, the commander of the Syrian army was a leper. His king sent him to the king of Israel with the message: ``I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:6). The king of Israel thought that the king of Syria was trying to provoke him. But the prophet Elisha said: ``Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8). The court physician could not heal the commander of the mighty army which had won many victories. This commander was a valiant hero, but he was a leper. Only from the man of God, by heavenly medicine, could he expect healing.

e. Both lead inescapably to death as there is no cure for either. The

sinner is unable to help himself. No one else can help him either. However, there is one Saviour, "for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). He is the Loving One, who gave Himself for us on the cross of Calvary and thereby overcame death victoriously.

2. Nine lepers who were also sick with ingratitude:

All the ten lepers cried out to Christ: "Master, have mercy on us!" (vs. 13), and they were all physically healed. But nine of them did not return to give thanks!

The sin of ingratitude is widespread among us. It appears in many daily practical situations. For instance, many children forget to thank their parents for their love and the service they render. We often forget to thank those whom Christ uses to lead us to His saving knowledge. How many responsible people serve us in the government, in the church and at home without hearing a word of thanks from us. They would only hear our noisy grumbling if we see in their performance something we would consider to be laxity! Think about a friend of yours. Think about your teacher. Think about your doctor. Think about your religious leader! Have you thanked any of them for their services?

How often we forget kindness and favours! Therefore David said to himself: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

Why did they go ungrateful?

a. Perhaps the ingratitude of the nine was due to their belief that they had not committed any great sin for which they deserved to contract leprosy. When the Lord had taken away their disease, they did not see anything deserving thanks. Christ had only done to them what He was duty-bound to do! He lifted a burden from their backs that should not have been laid there.

b. Perhaps their ingratitude was due to their lack of confidence

that their healing would be permanent. Maybe they wanted to be certain first that their new-found health would last, and then only would they start thinking about the next step maybe they would give thanks then!

c. It is also possible that they did not want to be in the company of the Samaritan on their way back. Jews would not have anything to do with Samaritans. Disease and hardship had brought them together, so that social and ethnic differences were forgotten. They were united in the affliction of their disease. They joined their voices together asking for healing. But when they had been healed, their good health and circumstances split them! Hardship united them and freedom split them!

d. It is possible that they were thankful in their hearts, thinking that this would be enough, even though the Psalmist says: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You" (Psalm 22:22, Hebrews 2:12).

Why do we not give thanks?

a. The habit of receiving: The soul who is content with praying requests, forgets to express thanks. When God gives abundantly and does not withhold His blessing in times of hardship, we become selfish and ungrateful. We receive without recognising the favour rendered. We continue to ask ungratefully. May God keep us from the sin of getting used to receiving without giving thanks!

b. Preoccupation with the gift forgetting the giver: We are preoccupied with the need, and when God grants us something, we are concerned with the answer to prayer. We are like children: You bring your child a gift, and he runs away to play with it or to eat it. When his mother calls upon him to say "thank you" to you, he will mutter it carelessly, because he only cares about the gift! May God keep us from spiritual childishness!

c. Our standing far away from the Giver: Maybe we are ungrateful because we stand far away from the Lord, who says: ``Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). The believer who seeks to enjoy true spiritual life will decrease the distance between him and the Lord, so that it will become obsolete. He says with the psalmist: ``The Lord will take care of me" (Psalm 27:10). He will remain in the bosom of divine care. Christ said, ``Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4).

The thankful believer will enjoy the gift much more than the one who does not give thanks, because he seeks the Lord. The ones who are in God's company, shall not lack anything.

3. A lesson from the one who gave thanks:

His condition was wretched. He cried out to the Lord, who heard his cry and healed him. When he returned to give thanks, he received even greater blessings.

a. He enjoyed the healing which he got, by the grace of the new spiritual salvation which Christ bestowed on him. ``Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife" (Proverbs 17:1). When you become reconciled to the Lord, you will find that ``the blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

b. He offered Christ the worship which strengthened his relationship with Him.

How many are those who know the caring God without knowing the saving God. This Samaritan leper, who obtained healing, experienced the care of the great Physician and then the salvation of the generous Redeemer. Therefore, he praised God with a loud voice, louder than the voice with which he had asked for healing.

He fell down before Christ's feet, thanking Him. Christ smiled at him acceptingly, and what a privilege!

c. This prepared him for a life of thankfulness and praise in heaven. "But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35,36). They praise God day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy". When we praise and thank Him here, we are preparing ourselves to praise and honour Him when we gather around His throne.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. The diversity of His ways of interacting with us:

God's work with us is many-faceted. It is impossible to cast it in one mould. God speaks and interacts with us in many ways.

Christ did not touch the lepers in this instance, but healed them by His authoritative word. He then ordered them to go and get their healing certified by the priest in the temple, according to the law's commandment (Leviticus 13:17). He had healed a leper before, where He "put out His hand and touched him" (Mark 1:41).

In our studies of the miracles we have seen how Christ interacted with people in ways suiting their faith and conditions, in order to bring them "life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

He challenged the strong faith of the Phoenician woman to make it even stronger (Matthew 15:23-26).

He strengthened Jairus' shaky faith in order that he might not fail in facing the trial (Mark 5:36).

He first healed and then forgave, as we saw it with the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:8,14).

He first forgave and then healed as we saw it with the paralyzed man who was lowered from the roof (Mark 2:5,9).

However, no matter how different the ways in which Christ interacts with us are, His love never changes. His faithfulness remains the same, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).

Let us consider with open and alert minds and thoughts the ways in which He interacts with us, and understand that He comes to our aid, whether from far away or near, whether it takes a long or a short time. He may come in the last or the first watch of the night, but He will come for certain. So let us live, waiting for the Lord with a trusting faith.

2. He asks, "Where are the nine?"

Christ was never stingy with His gifts. He is the One who lets His sun rise over all. He gives to everyone in need. However, He does ask, "Where are the nine?" (vs. 17) because He expects a word of thanks from us, which is His right!

Christ asked this question because He wanted to give those nine something more. He does have a greater blessing in store than food which perishes. He wanted the healed men to return to Him so that He can satisfy them with the food which endures to everlasting life and tell them about the living water which leaves the one who drinks of it never to thirst, but flows from him to others.

May God make us like the healed man who gave thanks!

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, You give and give without waiting for thanks. W

benefits? The cup of Your salvation shall we lift up, and with Your name shall we call, and render to You the highest tokens of thanksgiving.

Forgive us when the good that Your gracious hand lavishes upon us diverts us from thinking of You. Give us maturity that loves the Giver more than the gift, so that we have the maturity of adults in Your love, those who are mature in Your obedience. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does this command of Christ to the ten lepers seem strange: "Go, show yourselves to the priests"?
2. Mention five ways in which leprosy resembles sin.
3. Mention three reasons that supposedly could have kept the nine from offering thanks to Christ.
4. Why do people today fail to give thanks to God?
5. Mention three things by which God distinguished the healed man who gave thanks.

THE TWENTY-SECOND MIRACLE

HEALING THE MAN BORN BLIND

¹As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ⁸ His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." ¹⁰ "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. ¹¹ He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." ¹² "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. ¹⁷ Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸ The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your

son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"²⁰ "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind."²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"²⁶ Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses."²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes."³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."³⁷ Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."³⁸ Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are

we blind too?" ⁴¹Jesus said, ``If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains" (John 9:1-41).

St. John wrote his Gospel after the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark and Luke had been written. The Gospel (which means the Good News) is one. It is about the coming of Christ into our world. Those who tell the Good News are many. When John wrote his version of the life of Christ, many of Christ's miracles and teachings were already widely known. Therefore, John intended to mention those of Christ's miracles and teachings which the other Gospel writers had not mentioned. When he did mention a miracle which someone else had written about, he would add the teaching associated with it and his own comments.

John mentions four miracles which happened in Galilee: The changing of the water into wine (John 2); the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4); the feeding of the five thousand and Christ's walking on the water (John 6). He also mentions four miracles performed in Judaea: The healing of the man who had been sick for 38 years (John 5); the healing of the man born blind (John 9); the raising of Lazarus (John 11) and the great catch of fish (John 21).

The miracle we are dealing with now is not mentioned by any of the other evangelists. It happened at the entrance to the temple in Jerusalem. This was a place where beggars gathered, and the miracle was performed on a Sabbath. The Jews were not used to seeing anyone do any work, however good it might be, on the Sabbath. When Christ performed this miracle, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled: ``In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness" (Isaiah 29:18). The blind whom He healed heard the words of His Gospel and their hearts' eyes were opened, as well as

those of their bodies, that they might know Him and accept His salvation.

The evangelists mention several miracles of blind men receiving their sight: The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida, whose healing happened in two stages (Mark 8); the healing of the two blind men (Matthew 9); the healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10) and that of the man born blind (John 9).

Let us consider here:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. Blind since his birth:

This man born blind represents all of us. He is a symbol of our spiritual blindness. We were brought forth in iniquity and our mothers conceived us in sin (Psalm 51:5). We are born spiritually blind. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way (Isaiah 53:6). The influence of the Gospel "is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3,4). Therefore, mankind walks "as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart" (Ephesians 4:17,18).

2. People reproached him:

The calamity of this blind man was not confined to his disease only. The bystanders added insult to injury, considering his blindness to be the result of a sin he had committed. Any self-defence on his part was useless and maybe it even made things worse. They ascribed his disease even to a sin his parents had

committed. Poor man for his blindness, and poor man for the mercilessness of those around him! People always pick up stones to throw on others in order to let others mend their own ways for them and to blame their own shortcomings on others.

In His love Christ took the blindness of the man away as well as the unjust accusation. We know that the parents of the blind man were sinners. We, too, are sinners, for which human being is without sin? Christ, however, defended this man born blind by saying: ``Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (vs. 3). His blindness was the result of neither his own nor his parents' sin.

Sin may cause disease, as was the case with the paralytic who was lowered from the roof by his friends. ``When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, `Son, your sins are forgiven you'" (Mark 2:5). It is also possible that sickness cannot be linked directly with sin, as we see in the righteous Job's case. He was pious and avoided evil (Job 1:8). When Christ explained this truth to the listeners, He gave back the man's self-respect and silenced the voices of the reproachful. They were ignorant of what they were saying, attributing people's diseases to their sins while knowing nothing about these people's conditions. Often calamities are a means of proclaiming God's mercy.

3. He believed and obeyed:

Christ healed the blind man by spitting on the ground and making clay with the saliva. He anointed the eyes with the clay. He ordered him to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam. The blind man went to the pool in faith while he was still blind. Although he did not know who Christ was, he obeyed Him and went. Therefore, he received the blessing. Blessing is always on the head of the one who obeys.

Let us consider the faith of this man:

His faith grew gradually. In vs. 11, he said about Christ: ``A man called Jesus." Afterwards, he came to a higher degree of knowing Christ (vs. 17) when he answered the question of the Sanhedrin, ``What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, ``He is a prophet." After some thinking he had come to understand that Jesus could not possibly be a mere man. Then, in vs. 33, he said, ``If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." There were some false prophets who performed miracles by the power of the devil, but this prophet was from God, from above. Yes, He is above all, for ``He who comes from above is above all" (John 3:31).

The peak of his growing faith is shown in vs. 38. When Christ asked him, ``Do you believe in the Son of God?" he answered, ``Lord, I believe!" and then worshipped Christ.

First of all, this beggar had his eyes opened. He, then, experienced the grace of being adopted as a son. What he received from God was not what beggars get, but what sons get. Some are far from God while they ask from Him. They receive and experience His care. When God graciously adopts them, they ask for salvation from Him and experience it. They, then, experience God's salvation as well as His care.

4. He bore the witness of experience to Christ:

A wise proverb says, ``A bit of experience is worth more than a wealth of doctrine." This blind man had a profound experience, so he testified mightily to the power and love of Christ. After his healing the Pharisees threatened to cut him off from his membership with God's people. That poor beggar, who had never received any amount of teaching, stood firm in front of seventy religious scholars to answer their questions. He knew himself and witnessed to his own experience: ``Though I was blind, now I see" (vs. 25). Later, he said, ``I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to

become His disciples?" (vs. 27,28). He went on to say, ``Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He has opened my eyes!" (vs. 30). He was saying that the source of healing was divine, yet they wanted to explain it as a work of the devil or some kind of sorcery. The blind man's testimony before the Sanhedrin was rational and logical. He had not seen Christ before. However, as soon as he knew that Christ was a prophet, the Son of God, he worshipped Him in front of everybody. This was a living testimony and a proclamation of being His follower. Christ accepted his worship because He was worthy of such a worship.

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. The neighbours:

The neighbours heard what had happened with the man born blind. They loved gossiping and began discussing what had happened to him without having the slightest interest in him as a person!

They asked each other, ``Is not this he who sat and begged?" (vs. 8). Some said that it was he. Others that it was someone who looked like him. He himself insisted that he was indeed that person. Perhaps these neighbours were confused because the eyes of the man had been opened, causing a change in the appearance of his face. Furthermore, the joy that had filled his heart showed itself in the features of his face so much that it changed them.

These neighbours are like the many who live on the margin of life, who love to spend all their time gossiping, not caring about more important things. Not one of them was interested in the man himself. They did not try to ascertain anything concerning his identity. After only a superficial discussion they brought him to the Pharisees.

2. The Pharisees:

They were close-minded people. They refused whatever disagreed with their beliefs, even when their own eyes contradicted these beliefs! They did not like to do good except when it was favourable in their view. Their problem was hidden in their will, for they had no desire to believe in Christ.

A split occurred among them. One group said, ``This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath" (vs. 16), whereas the Law of Moses permitted people whose ox had fallen into a well on a Sabbath to pull it out. The Pharisees, however, refused Christ's work, the saving of a soul and the healing of a body, just because it happened on a Sabbath. They said, ``We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from" (vs. 29). They said this even though His miracles should have clearly convinced them that He was from God.

The Pharisees also denounced the blind man who had been healed. They said to him, ``You were completely born in sin, and are you teaching us?" (vs. 34). They refused his experience. It was as if they did not know that teaching is not just theory, but first of all experiences of everyday life!

3. The parents:

The Pharisees asked the parents of the man born blind three questions:

- a. Is this man your son? To which they answered, ``Yes."
- b. Was he born blind? They answered, ``Yes."
- c. How come he can see now? They answered, ``We do not know! Ask him. He will speak for himself."

They knew that the Pharisees wanted to punish them for having declared that they knew Christ and witnessed that He had performed the miracle.

There were three degrees of punishment:

- a. Exclusion from contact with relatives for thirty days.
- b. Exclusion for life from contact with relatives, except in cases of emergency.
- c. Exclusion for life from all the people, killing the guilty if possible. But capital punishment was reserved for the Romans alone. The Jews had to be content with merely excommunicating the guilty.

The Jews applied the third and most severe punishment in the case of the blind man who received his sight: ``And they cast him out" (vs. 33).

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ saw the blind man and took the initiative to heal him:

``Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth" (vs. 1). He saw that he needed to be able to see.

The blind man saw himself as nothing but a useless beggar, but Christ changed his life completely and made him a witness to Him. Thus, the beggar began to give the bread of life to the hungry in spirit. His life became most useful.

The disciples saw the blind man as a subject for intellectual discussion on the reason for sickness and suffering in the world.

Christ, however, saw him as a chance to proclaim God's love. He turned towards him in order to heal him without the blind man's asking for it. He also did this with the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5). How often we are ignorant of the blessings we miss. God opens our eyes to see their importance. He grants them to us. He then shows us their importance after we have received them. We discover that they are a great honour bestowed on us by the Lord. He then says to us: ``You did not choose Me, but I chose

you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

2. There were reasons why Christ healed the man:

a. That God might be glorified. Christ said, ``Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (vs. 3). Christ always revealed God's works. He put into action what He proclaimed: ``He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him" (John 7:18).

b. Because time was short. Christ said, ``I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (vs. 4). Thereby, He confirmed His words: ``A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going" (John 12:35).

c. In order to proclaim a message to the world. Christ said, ``As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (vs. 5). He confirmed this by saying, ``I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). These words are still true today. Christ still keeps enlightening hearts. ``But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings..." (Malachi 4:2).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, sin has blinded my eyes since the time I was born and turned me into a beggar begging the world for such a little amount that does not satisfy my needs, which makes me beg afresh. Open my eyes to see the truth, for You are the way, the truth, and the life. May Christ be my Saviour, Physician, Teacher and Friend! In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. John mentions four miracles which Christ performed in Galilee, and four which He performed in Judaea. Mention them with the Scripture references.
2. How can we say that this blind man represents and symbolises us?
3. How did Christ reject the allegation that blindness was the result of the blind man's sin or that of his parents?
4. Mention how the faith of the blind man grew gradually and then became complete.
5. "A little experience is worth more than a wealth of doctrine." Explain how this appeared in the testimony of the blind man to Christ.
6. Why did the parents fear testifying to Christ, who had healed their son, before the tribunal of the Jews?
7. Why did Christ take the initiative in healing the man born blind?

THE TWENTY-THIRD MIRACLE

RAISING LAZARUS

¹ Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. ⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judaea." ⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." ¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." ¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." ¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than three kilometres from Jerusalem. ¹⁹ And many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever

you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ²⁸ And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with

strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." ⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ You do not realise that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation. ⁵² And not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life. ⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples (John 11:1-54).

This miracle happened in the village of Bethany, three kilometres from Jerusalem. Because of the miracle, its present-day name is Al-Lazariyeh, according to the Arabic form of the name Lazarus.

The miracle took place within a family that loved Christ and was loved by Him. Lazarus was the oldest of the siblings in this family. His name means "God is a help." Jesus was truly helpful to him spiritually. He made Himself known to him and gave him new life. Jesus helped him physically when He gave him back his physical life by raising him from the dead. Jesus gave him fellowship when He spent a day at his house as his guest. Martha was the older sister of Lazarus. Her name is Aramaic and means "mistress"; it is

the same name as Kyria in Greek. As the mistress of the house she was responsible for it. She often hosted Christ (Luke 10:40). Mary was the younger sister of Lazarus. Her name means ``myrrh" or ``bitter". It was she who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and dried his feet with her hair (Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8). There was another sinful woman from Galilee who did the same thing for Christ (Luke 7:37,38). Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was not Mary of Magdala mentioned in Luke 8:2,3.

Concerning this miracle, let us consider:

1. The persons in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE PERSONS IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. Lazarus:

It seems that Lazarus was the person in need of the miracle. But this is not the case. Lazarus had gone to be in and enjoy the presence of the heavenly Father. He had entered into the joy of his Lord and experienced that which the apostle Paul longed for, ``having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). Lazarus could have said with Paul, ``I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

The advantage of Lazarus was to be with Christ. He was released from his earthly obligations and entered into his eternal rest.

So Lazarus was not the one in need of the miracle. Those who really needed it were his sisters Martha and Mary.

2. The two sisters:

a. Two sisters who loved the Lord: Mary, one of them, was the

woman who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and dried his feet with her hair (vs. 2). Martha, the other sister, undertook the obligations of hospitality to Christ (Luke 10:38-42).

b. They had come to know that the Lord loved them: Jesus loved that family, and they knew it. John testified, "The sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick'... Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (vs. 3,5). Christ Himself said, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up" (vs. 11). Jesus also wept at Lazarus' tomb when He learned about the death of His beloved one (vs. 35). As for the Jews, they too testified to this love, saying, "See how He loved him!" (vs. 36).

c. They reproached the Lord gently: Love expects much. When the expectations are not fulfilled, reproach begins. The two sisters reproached Christ because they had sent a messenger to Him saying, "He whom You love is sick." Despite that, Christ did not respond to the message, and Lazarus died. Martha told Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary repeated the same reproach (vs. 21,32).

This reproach reflects love and ignorance. Children love their father, but they cannot fathom how much he loves them. They reproach him for not giving them exactly what they ask for. Yet he always gives something much better than what they ask for. Christ allows us to reproach Him. Sometimes He reveals to us the wisdom which makes Him act with us in His own way and at His own time, which are different from what we expect. This reassures our souls and consciences.

d. They believe in the Lord: The faith of this family had history and depth. It was certainly a trusting faith. Martha said, "But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (vs. 22). This faith also had a mighty future. Martha said concerning her brother, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the

last day" (vs. 24). When the Lord told her, ``I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live", she said, ``Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (vs. 25-27).

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

1. The disciples:

They loved Christ. When He told them, ``Let us go to Judaea again" (vs. 7), they said to Him, ``Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" (vs. 8). There is a background to this: ``Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him... they sought again to seize Him but He escaped out of their hand" (John 10:31,39). Therefore the disciples feared for Christ and sought to keep Him safe. When they found, however, that He was intent on going to the dangerous place, Thomas said, ``Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (vs. 16). In that way they threw in their lot with Christ. They made His concerns their own, so they had the mind of Christ.

2. The comforters:

``Many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother" (vs. 19). Often those who came to pay their condolences would be tiring company, as Job told his friends, ``Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2).

The doubt of the Jews who were present there was stronger than their faith. Four months had passed since Christ had miraculously healed the man born blind, so they asked, ``Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" (vs. 37). Their doubt came from their superficial contact with Christ. Even though they knew that He had already raised people from the dead, they were not sure that He was capable of working a miracle with the dead Lazarus.

3) The Jewish leaders:

Among the eye-witnesses there were members of the Sanhedrin, who gathered a council and said, ``What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation" (vs. 47,48). This means that their political concerns meant more to them than their spiritual concerns. They feared that the people would install Jesus as king, as the expected Messiah, the king of Israel. The Romans would therefore suppress their revolt, destroy their land and kill them. Then Caiaphas, the high priest, said, ``It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish" (vs. 50).

Caiaphas prophesied unintentionally that Jesus ought to die, not only for the people, but for all the children of God who were scattered abroad. This prophecy of Caiaphas was, as far as he was concerned, only a political prediction, devoid of any spiritual implications. That was what Caiaphas had seen coming on his nation, and it did! What he said contained a profound spiritual meaning. Caiaphas' words were like those of Balaam, when he said about Christ, ``I see Him, but not now" (Numbers 24:17). When the Jewish religious leaders heard Caiaphas' political words, they began plotting to put Christ to death. Later they also began to plan to kill Lazarus, whose resurrection from the dead was a proof of Christ's mission and of His being the Messiah. Therefore ``the chief priests took counsel that they might also put Lazarus to death, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus" (John 12:10,11).

May the Lord keep us from just having knowledge about Christ without really knowing Him, the knowledge of someone who has a wealth of information and not the slightest bit of experience!

May we have the experience of knowing Christ more than a wealth of doctrine!

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ sees what is behind the difficulties of life:

When Christ heard that Lazarus was ill, He said, ``This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (vs. 4). He knew that the two sisters were exhausted and suffering. No one could blame them for being disturbed. Nevertheless, Christ did not respond to their invitation, because He knew that Lazarus' sickness was not unto death, but that He might wake him up from the dead (vs. 11). He was also to open the eyes of the two sisters to His life-giving power. Because of raising Lazarus we know who Christ really is.

Christ knows what is behind every problem we go through. He allows the problems to arise because He wants to be glorified in us and to glorify us and purify us to be like precious, pure gold and silver, purified seven times (Psalm 12:6). There is wisdom in His work. He will deal with our problems as He dealt with the storm on the lake: Even if the storm is so strong that it overpowers us, He will calm it. If He allows it to continue, He gives us greater strength to oppose it. We triumph in His strength.

If we are going through difficulties, it does not prove that God is punishing us. The objective of the difficulties is that we wake up from our slumber and spend the night waiting for His coming.

2. Sometimes Christ postpones the answer:

Sometimes, the Lord answers prayer even before we ask, because our heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). At other times, though, the answer tarries. ``When He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was" (vs. 6). At that time Christ was in Peraea. There must have been people there in need of His ministry. We only see

our own needs, whereas Christ sees our needs and the needs of others. He cares for all, gives to all and plans for all at the same time. That is why He did not leave Peraea immediately for the sake of His friend, because His ministry in Peraea had not yet been completed.

This delay was a blessing to Lazarus' family and also to us. Had Christ arrived while Lazarus was still sick, He would have performed a healing miracle like hundreds He had performed before. Now when Lazarus had died, He had to perform a miracle of raising someone from the dead. How happy Lazarus' family became! They paid a temporal price to obtain an eternal gain, both for themselves and for the Church through all generations. They and we have heard Christ declare, ``I am the resurrection and the life" (vs. 25).

3. Christ substantiated His words by His actions:

A false prophet speaks but does not act, whereas a true prophet substantiates what he says by what he does. Christ said, ``I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). He proved that His word is trustworthy by opening the eyes of the man born blind, making him say, ``Though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). And Christ said, ``I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (vs. 25,26). This claim of His was then substantiated by what He did when He ordered, ``Lazarus, come out." The dead man came out (vs. 43,44).

There was no difference between Christ's teachings and His behaviour. He never commanded His followers to do what He Himself did not put into action. He never exempted Himself from any principles He espoused.

4. Christ is perfect man:

a. He groaned in the spirit and was troubled: ``When Jesus saw

her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled" (vs. 33). ``Then Jesus again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb" (vs. 38).

The Greek word for ``groaning" has a connotation of grief. Christ grieved because death came into the world and spread to all men since they all sinned. Now He had come to save them. ``Groaning" also has a connotation of anger. Christ was angry because of the hypocrisy of the comforters and the Jewish leaders, who had no concern for Lazarus and his sisters. This is proved by the fact that they wanted to kill Lazarus after he had risen from the dead.

b. He ordered the stone to be taken away: We also see His humanity in verse 39 where He says, ``Take away the stone." Although He could have said a word which would have moved the stone, He needed a human being to take away the stone in order to reveal that the miracle truly happened and that Lazarus was not just unconscious, but really dead. Furthermore, He wanted the whole crowd to see the miracle and believe, so that no one could claim that there had been a secret agreement between Him and Lazarus's family to feign a miracle in order to deceive people.

c. He prayed: We see Christ at prayer saying, ``Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me. But because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me" (vs. 41,42). Here we see the beautiful relationship between the Son and His heavenly Father. The Son honouring the Father and the Father honouring the Son. The Son has fellowship with His Father in prayers which are always heard and answered.

5. Christ is perfect God:

He said, ``Lazarus, come forth!" (vs. 43) and the dead man came out at once. Some pious person once said: ``If Christ had just said, `Come forth!' without defining the name Lazarus, all the dead

would have risen from the graves! However, He called Lazarus specifically, so he alone rose."

Christ's authority over the spirits was evident when Lazarus' spirit returned from Paradise to the body four days after having left it. Christ's authority over the bodies was evident. The body rose uncorrupted after it had begun to decay! The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:5).

Who is that who has command over the whole world, heaven and earth, but the One who said about Himself, ``All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

With this heavenly authority Christ invites you now to rise from the death of your sins to a new life with Him. He says, ``He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, an hour has come, which is even now, when the dead shall hear the great voice of Christ, and those who hear shall live. Allow us to be among those who hear, so that You may bring them back from the death of sin to the true ever-renewed life, for Christ is the resurrection and the life. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the name ``Lazarus" mean? How did Christ fulfill the meaning of that name?
2. What does the name ``Martha" mean? And how did this meaning become reality for her?
3. Why was Lazarus not the one who needed the miracle?
4. How did the disciples declare that they loved Christ?
5. Was Caiaphas a prophet? How were his words about one man dying for the people fulfilled?

6. Why did Christ delay accepting Mary's and Martha's call?
7. Why did Christ ask someone to remove the stone from the tomb?

THE TWENTY-FOURTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE WOMAN BENT OVER

¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues. ¹¹And 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. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ``Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴ Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, ``There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." ¹⁵ The Lord answered him, ``You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water. ¹⁶ 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?" ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing (Luke 13:10-17).

This miracle happened in a synagogue in Perea on a Sabbath. The Jews only had one temple where they offered sacrifices and that was in Jerusalem. They were not allowed to build any other temple. However, they had many synagogues and study centres in the other towns. In one of Perea's synagogues, Christ healed the woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. Christ had already before healed a man in a synagogue, namely the man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1:23).

Concerning this miracle let us consider:

1. The woman in need of the miracle
2. The ruler of the synagogue and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE WOMAN IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

1. Her infirmity:

Luke the evangelist describes the crippled woman thus: ``[She] had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up" (vs. 11). The bones of her back had become rigid, bending her spine. She had not been able to raise herself up for eighteen years. Satan had kept her tied like this for all those years. She had to be loosened from those ties.

God in His love does not want any human being to experience what that woman had passed through. The Greek word for ``human being" is anthropos, which means ``upright man", someone who can raise his eyes to heaven. This is God's design for humans. This is what humans should have as their goal. Those who really enjoy being human are those who look to heaven where Christ is seated (Colossians 3:1).

Satan had stung this woman with an infirmity which crippled her very humanity. She had become like an animal, looking down. In spite of this, though, her spirit was still striving for heaven. She craved for the image in which God had created her. Solomon the wise said, ``Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

2. Her faith:

Christ met this infirm woman as she had come to the synagogue as usual to worship. She was faithful towards God. All the time she had been sick. In spite of her being bent over she had been going regularly to the house of God.

Her physical disability did not affect her spirit. At one of her regular visits to the synagogue, she received the blessing. Christ changed her life completely when He laid His hands on her ``and immediately she was made straight and glorified God" (vs. 13). Thus she realised the goal of her life and looked towards heaven. This woman's going to the synagogue could not be called dead,

useless routine. After all, Christ called her "a daughter of Abraham" (vs. 16), because she had the faith of Abraham. She was steadfast and regular in her worship and sought refuge with God. Many of us are distracted when we go to the house of God because of illness, family concerns or activities or stress of work. We lose many an opportunity where we could have met the Lord and received a greater blessing than we asked for or thought.

3. Her healing and thanksgiving:

This sick woman did not ask for healing; but her presence in the synagogue was a sign of her desire to be healed. It was a silent request for it. Christ hears the groan in the depth of the heart, however silent it may be. He sees the tears even though we do not scream and proclaim our requests loudly. He knows what we need before we ask Him. "He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the Lord viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those appointed to death" (Psalm 102:19,20).

After she had raised herself up, the woman became a companion to the one Samaritan among the ten lepers who became whole (Luke 17:15). She praised God. She also became a companion to the blind man at Jericho mentioned in Luke 18:43. The result of her thanksgiving filled the believers who were present with joy: "All the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him" (vs. 17).

II. THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE MIRACLE

In verse 15 Christ called him "Hypocrite!" This is a strong word, but it gives a true description of the man. When he saw the healing of the woman who was bent over and who usually attended worship at the synagogue every Sabbath, he became very indignant because Christ healed her on a Sabbath. If that sick woman had been his mother, sister, wife or daughter, he would have commented differently on the incident. If her case had been

of any concern to him, he would have interpreted the Law in a different way, to her advantage! Let us here mention the following of the ruler's sins:

1. He spoke to the people present while actually aiming his words at Christ without confronting Him directly:

He said, ``There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day" (vs. 14). If he had enough courage, he would have accused Christ directly, for it was He who broke the Sabbath and healed the sick woman. But the ruler of the synagogue instead directed his anger at the innocent crowd gathered there for worship.

2. This man had taken up Moses' seat without actually judging according to the Law of Moses or teaching what Moses taught:

``It is written in the Law of Moses, `You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written" (1 Corinthians 9:9,10). The Law of Moses was merciful to animals, especially on the Sabbath; and this synagogue ruler would deny mercy to a human being on a Sabbath!

3. He broke the rules of mercy which any ordinary human being would expect to be applied:

He claimed to be concerned about the Sabbath because he hated Christ and was jealous of His fame and people's love for and interest in Him. Therefore he broke the rules of mercy which any person would follow in such cases.

4. He wanted good to be done in his own way:

This man was a leader, but he acted as a follower. He served a rigid law. He was not a citizen of a living kingdom. He was more loyal to his own narrow-minded interpretation of the Law of Moses than to mercy and love. He had his own idea about how to do

good. When Christ came and did good in a different way and explained a new understanding about doing good, the soul of the synagogue ruler was filled with jealousy. He wanted good to be done in his way, instead of being filled with thankfulness and amazement at Christ's majestic work and at seeing God's power at work, represented by Immanuel, God with us.

5. He tried to incite others to side with him against Christ:

Sadly enough, many of the people present agreed with his words and his opposition to Christ. However, they understood the injustice done to Christ and the crippled, pious woman. When Christ silenced the ruler with His convincing answer, ``all His adversaries were put to shame" (vs. 17).

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ first diagnosed the woman's illness and then healed it:

a. He saw her (vs. 12). The poor woman was bent over. Maybe she could not see him because of her illness; but Christ saw her. Often our eyes are so filled with tears that we do not see Him, but we thank Him because He sees us. The most important and fundamental thing is His love for us. When we grasp His love for us we say with John the Evangelist, ``We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). When He sees us we can say to Him, ``In Your light we see light" (Psalm 36:9).

b. He called her: ``When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said, `Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity'" (vs. 12). He did not stop at seeing her, but called her and identified her weakness. He understood her situation and knew the difficulty she was going through. His heart went out to her and He had sympathy with her. He showed compassion and freed her from her weakness.

He is knocking at your door in order to give. Will you accept and open?

c. He touched her and healed her: Christ laid both His hands on her to show His compassion and acceptance of her. The result came immediately. The woman stood up straight and praised God for having made her straight.

d. He defended her healing against her accusers: When she had received healing, the ruler of the synagogue and those who shared his way of thinking attacked her healing on the Sabbath. Christ did not leave her to defend herself. He defended her and told the ruler, ``Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound think of it for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (vs. 15,16). Thus Christ added His defence of her to the blessing of granting her health.

2. Christ expounded the Law of Moses:

Many say that Christ contradicted and abrogated the Torah. This, however, is not what happened. A book which has been divinely revealed cannot be abrogated by another divinely revealed book. That is why the Bible contains both the Old and the New Testament. There is no contradiction between the two, for they have one source: God. Christ confirmed the Torah in several ways:

a. By quoting it: In a similar situation He said, ``Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those who were with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?" (Luke 6:3,4).

b. Christ expounded the Law of Moses: He asked those who were listening to Him, ``Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). By this question He

wanted to compel His listeners to think about what they were reading, that they might sincerely and intelligently apply the words of truth in their lives.

c. Christ talked about His authority: He said, ``My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:17,18).

d. Christ used sound logic in expounding the Law of Moses concerning the Sabbath: He said that the in^orm woman was more important than cattle. People untie their cattle to let them drink. The sick woman was a daughter of Abraham (unlike the ox). So would it be right to leave someone bound by Satan in a sickness like this for eighteen years, unable to live a normal daily life? Her sickness was a worse prison than the ox's stable and it lasted far longer than the time an animal is bound.

3. Christ's attitude towards women:

With well-informed historical thinking we see that it was Christ who really treated women justly. He brought women back to the way God wanted them to be. In Christ ``there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Christ's healing of the woman who was bent over reminds us of Christ's way of dealing with women in general.

a. He healed the wounds of the Samaritan woman in a knowledgeable, loving and faithful way: Instead of hurting her with His words, He treated her gently and lovingly. He made her aware of her fallen state and of the living water which could quench her. She received the living water from Him, repented and became a preacher to her village (John 4).

b. He touched Jairus' dead daughter's hand and called her,

``Talitha kumi" which means, ``Little girl, I say to you, arise." He raised her from the dead. ``Talitha" is the word a mother uses to call her daughter when she wants to wake her up in the morning (Mark 5:35-43).

c. He comforted the widow of Nain. She was weeping because her only son, in whom she had put all her hope, had died. Christ came up to her and told her, ``Do not weep." He brought her son back to life, and He gave him to her (Luke 7:11-17).

d. He forgave the sinful woman in the Pharisee's house. He gave her a blessing that the owner of the house, who invited Him for a meal, did not get. She loved Him much because He had forgiven her much (Luke 7:36-50).

e. He forgave the woman who had been caught in sin, while He wrote the sins of those who accused her on the ground, so that they left her. Then He led her to repentance (John 8:1-11).

f. He maintained friendship with the two sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42).

g. And here He is, healing a crippled woman. Christ does not discriminate between persons because of sex or race. He is the Saviour of all. ``He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Christ, the loving One, who stretched out His loving hands to the crippled woman who was bent over, so that she could stand up straight, also stretches out His hand to you now in order to set you straight, and first of all to set your relationship with Him straight.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, You are the One who straightens those who are bent over. Therefore we come to You to remove from our shoulders everything that makes us

bow down, and straighten out our backs and all our affairs.

O how much we need the touch of Your compassion that is extended to us at our time of distress, lifting our eyes to Your uplifted person! In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What had the illness done to the crippled woman? For how long had this been going on?
2. Who truly enjoys being human?
3. How did the crippled woman express her desire to be healed, and what do we learn from that?
4. Mention two shortcomings of the ruler of the synagogue in Perea.
5. Mention four things which showed that Christ cared about the crippled woman.
6. Mention the sound logical principle for interpreting the Law of Moses.
7. Mention three women whose importance Christ enhanced and how He raised each one's position.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH MIRACLE

HEALING BLIND BARTIMAEUS

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." ⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road (Mark 10:46-52, see also Matthew 20:29-34).

This is a miracle of healing a blind man near Jericho. A blind person cannot rely on himself to earn a living, does not know his way or people's faces or what things around him look like. He has to rely on others in order to live.

At Jericho, Jesus healed three blind men.

Luke mentions one of them. He was standing at a place near Jericho (Luke 18:35).

Matthew mentions two blind men.

Mark mentions one, whose name was Bartimaeus, perhaps because he was the most important of the two blind men Jesus healed, and perhaps he later became a Christian leader, known to the churches by this name.

There is no contradiction in the accounts of the evangelists of the

healing of the blind men at Jericho. Had Mark said that Christ healed only one blind man, while Matthew said that He healed two, it would have been a contradiction. In actual fact, each one of the evangelists complements what the others write, but does not contradict him.

We will consider the healing of Bartimaeus. In spite of his blindness, Bartimaeus stood heroically, struggling to reach Christ. He believed in Him. Christ rewarded him by opening his eyes to see what many people with normal eyesight could not see. He saw Christ, ``the Son of David'', the expected Saviour.

Let us now consider:

1. The one in need of the miracle
2. The eye-witnesses and the miracle
3. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, was the one in need of a miracle. Let us examine what he did and what happened to him:

1. He cried out:

Bartimaeus had lost his eyesight, but he had a powerful voice which he had become accustomed to using to attract the attention of passers-by that they might grant him some financial assistance. He used what he had, his voice, in order to get what he did not have. He cried, ``Son of David, have mercy on me" (v. 47). God always gives us a gift. We have to use that gift and to spend our latent energy in order to make up for what we lack.

2. He believed:

Bartimaeus saw in Christ ``the Son of David'', the Messiah, the expected Saviour who was to come into the world. When he asked what the reason was for the noise and commotion he heard, people answered that ``Jesus of Nazareth was on His way out from Jericho." The blind man, however, knew more about the

``Nazarene" than that He was a wonder worker. He understood that He was ``the Son of David", the Saviour Himself. Therefore he asked Him to have mercy on him. Not many citizens of Jericho saw in Jesus what Bartimaeus had seen.

We often hear about Jesus of Nazareth as a mere human being, a prophet, a messenger or servant of God. This is true, because ``the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14). But when the Holy Spirit enlightens our vision, we see His divinity and His humanity together. Beside being a man, He is also God, Jesus the Christ, the Saviour of the world and the Redeemer of mankind. We see His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. From His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace, because He is God made manifest in the flesh (John 1:16, 1 Timothy 3:16).

3. He was persistent:

He cried out, ``Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him in order to silence him. But he persisted and cried out all the more. It was possible that he could have fallen silent because this beggar was so used to having his requests turned down. He did not have any way of forcing anyone to give him something. This time, however, he persisted, implored and cried out more in spite of the opposition of the crowd towards him. He did not care about the ordinary human beings who were around him. He addressed his words to the One he trusted: Jesus the Son of David.

We, also, must knock on the doors of heaven and obey when we hear His answer, because His instructions must be followed.

4. He won:

Christ heard Bartimaeus and answered his request. The bystanders called him and led him to Christ. When he found that his garment would hinder or hamper him from moving, he threw it aside. He threw aside something valuable which he needed and

could not easily replace. Even so, as soon as he understood that this thing would hamper him, he threw it aside and came to Christ. Blessed is the man who overcomes that which may make him stumble or impede his coming to the Lord of Glory. There are things in our spiritual life which hamper us from coming to Christ. We must throw them aside. We can mention self-righteousness, which makes us believe that our good works will bring us near to Christ, as the Pharisee said: "God, I thank You that I am not like other men... I fast twice a week..." (Luke 18:11,12). Let us instead ask for the garment of righteousness which Christ grants us, intoning "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

5. He knew what he wanted:

When Christ asked what he wanted he knew it exactly. Because of his poverty he could have thought of asking for money to invest and live off its returns. He did not do that, however, for he had already decided what he wanted and already knew what he needed: to be able to see. He did that although he knew that being able to see would lose him his job, as he would no longer be able to live from charity.

6. He received clear vision of his eye and his heart:

Christ gave him what he asked for. He ordered him, "Go your way. Your faith has made you well" (vs. 52). Blessed was Bartimaeus, because he did not receive sight only, but insight as well. He was given the privilege of having seen Christ's face and the salvation of his soul.

7. He followed Jesus on the road:

Immediately upon having had his eyes and his insight opened, Bartimaeus made an extremely important decision: to be a disciple of Christ forever. He followed Jesus on the road.

The road of Christ is narrow. The person who walks it must deny himself and take up his cross in order to follow Christ (Matthew 7:13; 10:38). It is also the road of holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

Sometimes the road of Christ will take us up on the Mount of Transfiguration, where we can see Him in His risen power. But it may also sometimes take us down to the Valley of Tears and the Shadow of Death. In either case, however, He will go before us and lead us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Philippians 3:10, Psalm 23:3).

Bartimaeus followed Christ because He is the Master. He called Him: ``Rabboni'', ``My Master'' (vs. 51). He confessed that Christ was the Lord and Master who had it in His power to give and to change the gift to an even better one. That is why Bartimaeus put himself at the disposal of the only Wise One, our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE EYE-WITNESSES AND THE MIRACLE

The eye-witnesses here are the crowds gathered around Christ. We may see them as an image of the Church today.

Let us consider what they did:

1. They rebuked Bartimaeus to silence him:

They were concerned about Christ's effort and time. When He was in Jericho, He preached and performed miracles. They thought that He would have no time for Bartimaeus. They imagined that they were expressing their love for Christ by preventing Bartimaeus from disturbing Him. This is what the Church does sometimes. When it receives blessings from Christ it does not share them with others. The world around us is seeking Christ. We sometimes keep Him to ourselves, or we stand as a stumbling block to those who need Him!

2. They called him, saying, ``Be of good cheer, rise":
Christ came for the sake of all, especially for the ones in need. That is why Christ stopped the crowd and commanded them to call Bartimaeus. Some of the bystanders understood Christ's good will. After they had rebuked Bartimaeus in order to silence him, they changed their attitude towards him in obedience to Christ. They told Bartimaeus, ``Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you."

The bystanders teach us an important lesson. They were ready to change their minds so that they agreed with Christ's, just because they understood the divine mind.

King David told the prophet Nathan that he wanted to build the Lord a house. Nathan responded logically to David's proposal and encouraged him without taking counsel from the Lord. Then the Lord commanded Nathan to tell David not to build such a house, because David's son would do it. Nathan was great when he went to excuse himself to David for his first answer and present his second answer which was from God (2 Samuel 7). The faithful messenger is always ready to change his mind so that it agrees with Christ's mind. He is the one who receives from Christ what he presents to people.

3. They led him:
Some led him through the throngs of people to Christ. Because he was blind, he would no doubt bump into people if he tried to get to Christ on his own. Those who led him expressed their love for him and for Christ.

Christ expects us to discern His voice and speak His words. We should take a stumbling person by the hand to lead him to where he can meet Christ. For people do not search for Christ's servants, but they do search for Christ by way of His servants. May God teach us as a Church to know our own limits. We are only servants carrying the Word, of which Christ is the Master.

III. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ the famous:

``He heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth" (Mark 10:47): Christ's personality is extremely attractive. Everyone who hears about Him would love to get to know Him and study what He says. He is unique and perfect in every way. When we have experienced Him in our hearts as the Saviour, we say with the Psalmist, ``My heart is overflowing with a good theme, I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalm 45:1).

2. Christ the Son of David, the merciful:

``Son of David, have mercy on me!" (vs. 47). How wonderful are His mercies! Christ did not perform one single miracle in order to serve Himself. Every one of His miracles comes from love, sympathy and tenderness to souls in need. ``He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, `You are the Son of God'" (Mark 3:10,11).

3. Christ the unique One:

The multitude shouted at the blind man. They warned him to be quiet. But Christ acted differently. ``Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called" (vs. 49). In everything Christ was different from the multitudes around Him. Being holy means being different. Christ's way of thinking and His responses were different from that of others. Human beings have limited capabilities and strength. They become tired and cannot give attention to the needs of everybody around them. Whereas Christ is unlimited and opens His door wide. The one who comes to Him He will by no means cast out (John 6:37).

4. Christ compels no one:

Christ asked Bartimaeus: ``What do you want Me to do for you?"

(vs. 51). He asked what he wanted even though He knew the need! He still asks us the same question in order to assure us that we have freedom to choose and that He does not compel us.

He says, ``If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come unto him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). ``If anyone desires to come after Me..." (Luke 9:23). He never presumed on anyone's hospitality. He is strong but tender and respects man's freedom. He draws us with gentle cords (Hosea 11:4), so we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

5. Christ is the One who grants salvation and is worthy of being followed:

Christ said, ``Go your way. Your faith has made you well." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road (vs. 52). Christ granted him healing of his body and soul and let him go. But Bartimaeus decided to follow Christ. There is something very attractive about Christ which makes us love and respect Him and want to be like Him. When we consider Him, we want to be His image, for there is no wrong in Him which we could excuse Him for or defend or hide from people, or try to explain away! When we let people see His splendor, they enjoy seeing God. He Himself said, ``He who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

``He followed Jesus on the road." Following Christ is not just following a certain idea, philosophy or doctrine. It is following a living person. Jesus is a lifestyle. That is why primitive Christianity was called ``The Way" (Acts 9:2).

Have you come to know Christ the Saviour? Have your eyes been opened to the splendor of His love? Come and follow Him on the road!

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, you honour us when people insult us. You take good care of us when people neglect us. You stand by us when people desert us. You hear our cry for help when people shut us up. You are the refuge and with You is the shelter.

W

Therefore we follow You down the path of the cross, that leads to the resurrection and ascension. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. How many blind men did Christ heal at Jericho? Why does Mark only mention Bartimaeus?
2. How did Bartimaeus use what he had in order to reach Christ?
3. How can one say that Bartimaeus' persistence in wanting to be healed represented a danger to his material situation?
4. Which are the things we must lay aside because they hamper our spiritual healing?
5. What important decision did Bartimaeus take after he had been healed? And what do we learn from him?
6. How can we compare the Church today with the eye-witnesses to the miracle of Bartimaeus' healing?
7. "Christ is unique" explain this idea.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH MIRACLE

CURSING THE FIG TREE

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. ¹² The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. ¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves; ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as He taught them, He said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'." ¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill Him, for they feared Him, because the whole crowd was amazed at His teaching. ¹⁹ When evening came, they went out of the city. ²⁰ In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" ²² "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³ "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:11-26).

⁶ Then he told this parable: ``A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, `For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' ⁸ `Sir,' the man replied, `leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilise it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down' " (Luke 13:6-9, see also Matthew 21:18-22).

This miracle seems strange to us, for we are used to seeing Christ healing the sick, raising the dead and blessing everyone who asks. In this miracle, however, we see Christ cursing a fruitless fig tree.

We can learn much from this miracle concerning what the Lord expects from our spiritual life. We should not depend so much on His love that we become negligent in practicing our faith. True, He is the God of love, but He is also the supreme just Judge!

God gave this fig tree all it needed to bear fruit. It responded by putting forth green leaves, so that someone who looked at it would expect to find fruit on it. Christ came expecting it to give what it had promised Him. He found nothing but leaves on it, so He condemned it: ``Let no fruit grow on you ever again." It withered immediately (vs. 19).

This miracle happened on Monday of passion week. Let us keep in mind that the day before, Sunday, was the day of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when He cleansed the temple of those who conducted business in it. The temple was a beautiful structure to look at, full of worshippers coming to offer their sacrifices and tithes to the Lord. However, in spite of this external appearance, it was void of worship in Spirit and truth. Therefore Christ was so violent towards the salesmen, throwing them out and overturning the tables of the money changers and the chairs

of the meat-sellers. He told them, ``It is written, `My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.' But you have made it a 'den of thieves'" (Matthew 21:13).

The day after, Monday, Christ passed by that leafy tree. It was like the temple, full as it was of worship, but without Spirit. It was full of leaves but bore no fruit! Just as Christ proclaimed His condemnation of the Temple and said that not one stone should be left upon another that would not be thrown down and His prophecy was fulfilled, the fig tree withered immediately after Christ had condemned it.

The pious Jews used to sit under fig trees worshipping and meditating on God's words and mercies. Nathanael was sitting meditating under the fig tree. When Christ met him, He told him, ``Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (John 1:48). Seeing a fig tree inspired piety and worship. But the fig tree which Christ cursed displayed the opposite characteristics!

The fig tree also symbolises peace and prosperity. The condition of the children of Israel in times of success and peace was described in this way: ``Each man under his vine and his fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25). The fig tree we are dealing with here, however, gives an impression of peace and safety with no reality behind it.

The fig tree is a symbol of the Israelites as well. The Lord expected His fig tree to give fruit to all the other nations. The Israelites contented themselves with the outward appearance of worship without the spirit of worship. The Gospel says about them, ``He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Therefore He left them and directed His message to the Gentiles who would bear its fruits. The cursed fig tree vividly describes the situation of the Israelite nation, which frustrated the expectations which the Lord had for it!

Let us now consider:

1. The people in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE PEOPLE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

The people in need here are the disciples who observed the miracle. They saw the curse of the fruitless tree and how it withered. They learned a number of spiritually useful lessons. Let us consider four lessons which we need today, maybe more than the disciples would have needed them!

1. Uselessness brings about destruction:

In spite of having leaves, occupying a piece of land and sapping the soil, the fig tree did not produce the fruit that was expected of it. Its uselessness thus was the reason why it withered.

God put us on earth that we might bear fruit. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). We were dead in our sins and transgressions, but Christ brought us to life and raised us up from the death of our sins and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies, that we might be fruitful in good works. Christ comes to us to look for our fruit. Are we really fruitful, or is the light which is in us darkness? He will ask us what benefit we have rendered to His Kingdom and the world. We must justify our existence by being beneficial to those around us.

2. Hypocrisy results in judgment:

The tree appeared to have produced figs, but, in reality, there were just leaves. It did not bear fruit, because it did not have the power to do so. In this way it became a symbol of lip service and hypocrisy.

The great Indian leader Gandhi might well have become a Christian. In the early years of his life in South Africa, he used to pray in a church. When he studied in England, he went to church

regularly. However, what did he find in the churches where he prayed? The church he attended in South Africa was like a social club where people went to enjoy themselves with their friends. It had no message of salvation and no concern for other people! In England, he was sitting in a church one day, when the church warden came up to him and said, ``This place is not for you." Then he led him to another place reserved for coloured people! Gandhi then said, ``If it weren't for the Christians, I would have become a Christian!" If Gandhi had in fact become a Christian, he would have had an enormous impact on the whole Indian society, but he had too much contact with Christians who were like the unfruitful fig tree. Many Christians have the form of godliness, but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

Christ said, ``Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2-6).

The apostle Jude talks about ``clouds without water" (Jude 12). What is the use of a cloud that gives no rain so that the earth may bring forth fruit? It is just a deception, raising hopes of heavy rainfall, but no rain comes! It is like the angel of the Church of Sardes, to whom Christ said: ``I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1). He had a name and an image, but in fact he was devoid of life. He was like the fig tree which had an appearance but no substance.

3. Attempting to hide oneself leads to ruin:

When our original parents sinned in the Garden of Eden and ate from the tree of which they were forbidden to eat, their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig

leaves together and made themselves coverings (Genesis 3:7). However, it was impossible for those leaves to cover them, for they would dry out. God then opened their eyes to see that they needed the clothing of godliness and the garment of salvation. "The Lord God made tunics of skin and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). Lest these our original parents should think that they could be forgiven by hiding under tunics of skin (i.e. by expiatory sacrifices of animals), God promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The "Seed of the Woman" is the One who atones and forgives and covers our sin. With His sacrifice there is no more need for repeated sacrifices. Christ, in sacrificing Himself, brought about everlasting redemption, once and for all. The Righteous One died for sinners. So we see in Adam's and Eve's attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves a human attempt which is a total failure.

When Christ cursed the fruitless fig tree, He wanted to tell all of us that no one can be justified by his own efforts. Justification is only by the sacrifice of Christ, who said on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). All attempts of man to cover himself will fail, because they are the fruit of a sinner who is a failure. The only Saviour is Christ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7).

4. Effective prayer:

Matthew the Evangelist says, "Now when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither away so soon?' Jesus answered them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea', it will be done'" (Matthew 21:20,21). This verse has a special place in the history of the Egyptian Christians. In the Fatimid age, a Jewish person told the Fatimid Caliph al-Aziz Billah about this verse. The Caliph sent for the Orthodox Patriarch and asked him to prove the truth of his gospel by moving Mount

Muqattam. After fasting and prayer, the mountain was lifted up. This was a most influential event in the life of the Fatimid statesmen.

May we by the grace of Christ have a life of continuous, profound, answered prayer. Christ gave His disciples a mighty promise: ``And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13,14). Effective prayer removes the mountains of hindrances. It helps us to do the work of God. It makes us receive His grace so that we are changed. It gives us strength to bear all difficulties, whatever they may be.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Three objections are raised against Christ because He cursed the fig tree:

a. How come He did not know that the tree was fruitless before he arrived at it? We can answer that by saying that the Evangelists never mention that Christ was ignorant about the fact that the tree bore no fruit before He came to it. He did know it, but He wanted to teach His disciples some lessons. God asked Adam, ``Where are you?" not because He did not know where Adam was, but in order to make Adam aware of the mistake he had made. He had known that he would sin before He created him. But this knowledge did not make Adam sin. Because of this foreknowledge, God arranged Christ's redemptive work, which was known before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20).

b. The second objection: How come Christ expected to find figs on the fig tree when it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:13)? Answer: It was the season of the firstfruit figs. Firstfruits were of a smaller size than ripe ones, but very sweet. And the fact that there were leaves on the fig tree would normally mean that it would also bear those firstfruits, which was what Christ wanted from it.

c. Why did Christ curse the fig tree without giving it a chance to produce fruit? We find the answer in the parable which Christ told before He cursed the fig tree. He said, "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilise it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down'" (Luke 13:6-9).

We do not understand the conditions of the cursed fig tree. Christ, however, must have known that it had had its share of his patience, but still had not produced the expected fruit. Therefore He proclaimed it to be cursed. We know that trees do not feel pain when they wither. Furthermore, the tree had no owner that could be disadvantaged by its withering, because it was standing by the road. Christ did not cause damage to anyone, but gave us an important lesson in condemning hypocrisy.

2. W

a. His power: This baffled the disciples as much as it would baffle us, even if we saw Christ's power at work among us all the time. Sometimes we get so used to the miracles Christ works among us that we take them for granted. We need to learn to be amazed whenever we see God's power at work in our midst.

b. His justice: The fruitless fig tree deserved to be cursed. This is Christ's justice. He had given it a fair chance, but it yielded neither fruit nor produced firstfruits. It deserved the punishment of heavenly justice from God, who is faithful and just.

c. His long-suffering: He does not want anyone to perish, but wants us to repent. "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance

with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who `will render to each one according to his deeds'" (Romans 2:4-6).

Let us ask God to make us fruitful, and that His long-suffering may cause us to strive to bear fruit and more fruit.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank you because you equipped us with all we need to be fruitful. Forgive us our weakness that fails to accomplish what You expect from us. Put Your holy hand on everything that delays our blooming and bearing fruit, and give us the power to eradicate them, so that we may bear fruit and that our fruit may increase and remain.

QUESTIONS

1. What common lesson can we learn from Christ's cleansing of the temple and His cursing of the fig tree?
2. In which way does the cursed fig tree resemble the Israelite nation?
3. Explain how uselessness leads to destruction.
4. Explain how hypocrisy leads to condemnation.
5. Three objections are raised against Christ. Mention and answer them.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MIRACLE

HEALING THE EAR OF MALCHUS

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him. ⁴⁸ But Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" ⁴⁹ When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him (Luke 22:47-51, see also Matthew 26:51-54, Mark 14:47 and John 18:10,11).

This miracle is quite unique, full of symbolisms and profound lessons, although it seems to pale in view of the much more important events surrounding it, namely the arrest of Christ and his trial. It is the only one in which Christ healed a person who had been hurt by someone, and it is also the last healing miracle of Christ while He was on earth in the flesh.

Malchus accompanied the soldiers of the temple guard, who were on their way to arrest Christ, led by Judas Iscariot. Peter tried to defend Christ by striking Malchus with his sword and he cut his ear off; but Christ was opposed to what Peter had done. He healed Malchus' ear. Christ, while under arrest, was still working miracles and teaching love. This miracle proves to us Christ's love for His enemies and His perfect goodness towards them. At the same time, it reveals to us His mighty power and divinity.

In reading about this miracle, one will remember Christ's prayer on the cross for those who crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Who but Christ could raise up such a petition at such a time?! Truly, He is the Teacher of Love, who always practices it.

All the four evangelists mention this miracle. Luke, the physician, who showed Christ's concern and love for people, is the only one who mentions that Christ healed the ear which had been cut off. He is the only one who quotes Christ as saying, "Permit even this" (Luke 22:51). We do not know to whom Christ addressed these words: to the disciples or to those who came to arrest Him. If it was to the disciples, He would have meant: "Stop right there; do not strike again. Have patience and do not oppose evil with evil." If He had said it to the soldiers, He would have meant: "Do not punish all of the disciples for what one of them has done. Forgive them and let me have freedom to move my shackled hands so that I can heal the wounded ear."

St. John is the only one who mentions the name of the disciple who struck the high priest's servant, namely Peter, as well as the name of the man who had his ear cut off, Malchus. The reason is that St. John was the last one to record the life of Christ. At the time of recording it, Peter was already dead, so he could not jeopardise his life by mentioning his name. Moreover, John was acquainted with the higher circles and known to the high priest (John 18:15). He knew the name of the high priest's servant and recorded it for us. John was an eyewitness. He knew the one who struck as well as the one who was struck. He confirms that what he has seen is true and trustworthy, so that we might believe in Christ, the Loving, Forgiving One, the Performer of Miracles.

The four evangelists recorded different comments that Christ made after the miracle. It seems that He spoke at length with His disciples and those who arrested Him about what Peter had done. Each evangelist recorded some of what Christ said, Matthew recording more than the others.

By healing Malchus' ear, Christ ended the calamity of this servant. He put Peter's fault right. He prevented the damaging influence this incident might have had on the disciples. He rescued them

from being arrested with Him, because He caused the case to be directed against Himself only. He spared them by carrying the full responsibility for this mistake. Thus the ones who arrested Him brought Him to the cross.

We can do nothing but bow our heads before Christ, the Marvellous One, and consider the following concerning the miracle:

1. The ones in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THE ONES IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

At the first glance it seems that the one in need of the miracle is Malchus, as his ear had been cut off. However, the first person in need was Peter and then ourselves. In his zeal, Peter used violence against violence. We do the same thing, though the damages resulting from our actions are not repaired as quickly as the result of Peter's mistake was repaired. How often we do what is wrong and destructive because we are far from the mind of Christ, the Loving and Forgiving One!

Let us consider Malchus, the one in need, and ourselves represented by Peter, who was also in need of the miracle!

1. Malchus:

His name means "king", but he behaved like a servant of sin. He was not free to decide for himself, but being a servant he was subject to the whims of his master, the high priest. He was different from those who came to arrest Christ. They could claim their wages as police officers, whereas he had heard much about Christ from his master, so he saw and judged Him according to the opinion of the high priest. Accordingly, he had decided that Christ presented a danger to the state because the people wanted to install Him as king. If that were to happen, the Romans would consider it a revolt against them and would attack and destroy the country. Therefore the high priest had said, "It is expedient for us

that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish" (John 11:50). This meant that Christ would have to die! Being convinced about this, Malchus accompanied the group going out to arrest Christ under the pretext of serving the whole people. As soon as Peter saw the attackers coming, he drew his sword, struck at Malchus and cut his ear off!

None of the four evangelists mention that Malchus, after he was healed, backed off from what he came to do. This shows how ungrateful Malchus was. He had received a blessing from Christ, but did not render Him any thanks or recognition. He expressed no repentance. He made the devil's case against Christ his own by remaining unresponsive to Christ's love.

How many are those who receive a favour, and how few are those who recognise it and give thanks!

2. Peter:

a. The disciples were torn between defending Christ with the sword and refraining from violence as He had taught them. He had once told His disciples, "He who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36). They did not understand the spiritual meaning of this word, so they answered, "Here are two swords." He said to them, "It is enough." He did not mean that two swords were enough, but that there had been enough talk about this subject, which they did not understand. He may also have meant that what He had said was enough because they would come to understand from Him the intended spiritual meaning sometime later.

One of the swords appears to have been with Peter. When the multitude came to arrest Christ in the garden, His disciples asked Him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22:49). Peter did not wait for the answer. As usual he was foolhardy. He showed no patience but drew his sword and, being off balance, cut off

Malchus' ear. That which drove Peter to do what he did was noble enough, but his action was certainly wrong.

Often we act under the pressure of an urge so great that we do not wait to hear the Lord's voice. Then we make mistakes. Therefore our heart must always be patient before the Lord, waiting for His instructions. Let us ask the question, ``Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 3:10).

Christ's comment on what Peter did was ``Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). This word has two meanings:

* You are not to punish them. Leave them to the heavenly justice. They took the sword and will perish by the sword. This is what happened to all those who killed with the sword. Their life ended by the sword, as they were men of war more than of a heavenly mind.

* Christ is not in need of human help in order to defend Himself. He has more than twelve legions of angels which may do that. There is no doubt that divine justice will prevail, which says, ``Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19).

In fact, it did not even take forty years before those who arrested Christ were hung on crosses in Jerusalem. On that day not one stone was left upon another that was not thrown down. The prophecy of Christ was fulfilled (Mark 13:2).

b. Peter wanted to kill Malchus, but divine providence prevented him from killing a man. Christ showed kindness to Peter as well as to the rest of the disciples by healing Malchus. If Malchus had died, Peter and the other disciples would have been arrested. In this way the Lord protected them from that danger.

Christ also showed kindness to Malchus. Had Peter killed him he would have died without having had a chance to repent, if he

wanted to do so. Christ, in touching his ear to heal it, was granting him another opportunity to repent.

c. Peter had forgotten Christ's words about the cross and His suffering and the necessity of His arrest in order to be crucified. Christ brought him back to his senses by saying, "All this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matthew 26:56). Peter had already once before refused the idea of Christ's crucifixion. Even though Peter was expressing his love to Christ, Christ had warned him that he was on Satan's side (Mark 8:31-33). Christ came to give Himself for sinners in order to save them (Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10). Peter was very zealous for Christ, but his zeal was without knowledge.

d. Peter used violence, although using violence is no solution to a problem. It is useless, unnecessary and illogical to use violence, for Christ has all power in heaven and on earth. Only with this power are we able to save people and protect the kingdom. Let us learn how to commit ourselves to the mind of Christ and use the methods which He likes, for those who honour their Master must consider the way He thinks and His Spirit, so that they behave accordingly.

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. W

a. Christ the strong one: It looks as if Christ is in a weak position after one of His disciples had led His enemies to arrest Him. But the apparent weakness of Christ cannot hide His full inner strength. He performed the healing of the ear that had been cut off, even though His strength was veiled behind His flesh (Hebrews 10:20).

b. Christ forgives: Christ touched the ear of a man who wanted to arrest Him in order to have Him killed! How hard were the hearts of those who wanted Him dead! How tender is the heart of Christ!

Christ forgot His sufferings and their ungrateful attitude. He concerned Himself with the poor Malchus whose blood was running from his wound! He thought of him as a sinner in need of repentance, as well as a sick person in need of medical help! He touched his ear and his heart that he might perhaps repent!

Malchus handled Christ roughly and with force, whereas Christ handled him gently and with a healing touch. Christ still today treats His stubborn opponents in the same way. He touches them in love that they might return to Him and cast their sins on Him so that He can save them and give them rest and grace in abundance with no merit on their part.

c. Christ teaches: Christ has taught us that he who uses the sword will die by it. This is how He phrases it, "All those who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). These are the words of the Torah: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed" (Genesis 9:6). This is what the last book of the Holy Bible proclaims: "He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword" (Revelation 13:10). The sword is a weaker communication tool than books. It has a weaker influence than the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is at work in spreading the Gospel by His convincing power and His work in the hearts, not by the power of the sword. The Spirit convinces by the trustworthiness of the truth of the word of the Gospel. He opens our hearts to Christ, who said, "If I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32).

d. The necessity of the cross for fulfilling the prophecies: Christ declared that there was a possibility that He could avoid the cross by asking His heavenly Father to send Him more than twelve legions of angels. However, this would not lead to fulfilling the prophecies which must be fulfilled. Christ asked, "How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" (Matthew 26:54). The apostle Paul says in the oldest creed: "I

delivered to you first of all that which I also received: That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

No one took Christ's life. He gave it up Himself, considering the fact that He is the Redeemer and the Shepherd of His people (John 10:11).

2. W

healing of Malchus' ear:

a. The arrested person was in fact Christ Himself. He was not one who looked like Christ. This is proved by the fact that He healed Malchus' ear in perfect love and mighty strength. There is no other person who could possibly have healed Malchus' ear and behaved with such love and forgiveness.

b. We may oppose the Lord with the way we act and behave, but He loves us and wants to save us.

c. We must express our love to Christ in His way and according to His mind. May we have His mind!

d. We all have salvation by His cross. May our slogan be Paul's word: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, Your love for him who came to resist love makes us bow our hearts in awe and admiration. Forgive us when we join Malchus in his attack, and Peter in his rashness. Grant us to see Your hand in its power and love returning to us what we lost during the time we were astray from Your way. In Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. Mention two reasons why it must have been Christ Himself who was arrested, and not some other person.
2. Mention four blessings resulting from the healing of Malchus' ear.
3. What does the name "Malchus" mean? How can we say that his name contradicts his actions?
4. Did Christ's miracle change Malchus' attitude towards Him? Why or why not?
5. What did Christ mean by saying "It is enough", when the disciples told Him, "Here are two swords"?
6. Write a comment on Christ's saying: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword."
7. Explain the necessity of the cross from this miracle.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH MIRACLE

THE CATCH OF 153 FISH

¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. ⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. ⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred metres. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. ¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you

truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" ²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" ²² Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." ²³ Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (John 21:1-23).

This miracle reminds us of another one which happened three years earlier and is mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 5, when the disciples had spent a whole night trying to catch fish without being able to catch anything. Christ then asked them to row out to where the lake was deep and cast their nets. The boat was then filled with so many fish that they had to call in the help of others.

The miracle we will now consider happened after Christ's resurrection from the dead, during His seventh appearance. Seven of the disciples had decided to go back to fishing after having been full-time in God's ministry. Christ appeared to them in order to bless their lives and remind them about their past spiritual

experiences. He gave them back their confidence in Him and themselves. He recommissioned them in serving Him and publishing His Gospel.

Christ appeared to His disciples ten times after His resurrection:

1. To the women when they were returning from their visit to the tomb (Luke 24:1-11).
2. To Mary of Magdala alone (John 20:11-18).
3. To Peter alone (1 Corinthians 15:5).
4. To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).
5. To the apostles in Thomas' absence, in the upper room (Luke 24:36-49).

These five appearances happened in or near Jerusalem, on the first day of the week, the same day He rose from the dead.

6. To the disciples in the upper room in Thomas' presence (John 20:24-29).
7. To seven of the apostles at the Sea of Galilee, where the miracle we will now consider took place (John 21:1-24).
8. To the eleven apostles together with five hundred brothers on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20, 1 Corinthians 15:6).
9. To James (1 Corinthians 15:7).
10. To the eleven apostles in Jerusalem at the time of His Ascension (Acts 1:3-8).

The seventh appearance at the Sea of Galilee was a confirmation of Christ's promise to meet His disciples in Galilee. At the same time, it was the third appearance to the disciples as a group. His first and second appearances were in Jerusalem, once when Thomas was absent and once when he was there with the others.

The Sea of Galilee has different names, e.g. Lake Tiberias or Lake Gennesaret. The name "Lake Tiberias" comes from the town of Tiberias at shore of the lake, called after the emperor Tiberius. How many were the miracles and other things worth remembering which happened at the waters of that lake!

* Christ stood on its waters in a boat teaching the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-9).

* Christ fed the five thousand at its shores (Matthew 14:14-21).

* He calmed the storm there by His word (Mark 4:35-41).

* He walked on its water and made Peter do it, too (Matthew 14:22-36).

* Peter pulled a fish out of it and found a coin in its mouth (Matthew 17:24-27).

* Christ healed the man possessed by the demon called Legion at its shores (Mark 5:1-20).

* At its shore lay the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, in which many of Christ's miracles happened.

* At the beginning of His ministry, on the day when Christ called four of His disciples, He performed a miracle of a catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11).

Today, Christ still works with us where we are and helps us in every need, working miracle upon miracle, because He is living, risen from the dead, raised to heaven by God, and we expect His second coming to earth.

Let us consider:

1. Those in need of the miracle
2. Christ and the miracle

I. THOSE IN NEED OF THE MIRACLE

At the suggestion of Peter, seven of the disciples returned to the Sea of Galilee to fish, for this was their trade. The apostle Paul, like them, practiced a trade, which was tentmaking. He said, ``We were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labour and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you" (2 Thessalonians 3:7,8).

The seven disciples' return to fishing was not a religious relapse. It was not running away or apostasy from their ministry. It was just that they did not want to spend their time being idle or lazy, so they decided to work in order to kill the boredom that might otherwise have crept in from waiting, for they did not know when Christ

would come to meet them again. They also wanted to earn some money to live by.

1. They spent a night fishing in vain:

However, they were not alone. The eyes of the Lord were watching them. When we experience pain, distress and failure, we may think that we are alone, but this is not true. The eyes of our beloved Lord are watchful over us. A glorious morning will surely come. He knows what we are going through. His right hand will be stretched out with blessing the moment He finds to be suitable. When He takes His time, it is not because He is neglecting us, but because His timing is blessed and wise.

2. They did not recognise Christ when He came to them:

St. John says: ``When the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus" (vs. 4).

The outward appearance of Jesus had changed after His resurrection from the dead. He had acquired the body of glory. He will do the same to those who love Him in the last day. He is the One ``who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:21). This is the reason Mary Magdalene did not recognise Him when she saw Him at the tomb: ``She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus" (John 20:14). For the same reason, the two disciples at Emmaus did not recognise Him when He joined them on the road: ``So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him" (Luke 24:15,16).

3. At His word they cast the net:

When Christ issued His command, they obeyed and caught many fish. ``Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the

morning" (Psalm 30:5). This is what the disciples experienced. In Psalm 143:8 David says, "Cause me to hear Your loving kindness in the morning, for in You do I trust. Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You." He had said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," so we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6).

The disciples needed the expenses of the journey to Jerusalem. Christ provided for them completely with the fish they had caught.

4. The disciples caught 153 big fish:

The Gospel mentions the exact count of the fish they caught. There are many symbolical interpretations to explain the number:

a. The Greek poet Opian mentions in one of his odes, composed at the time this miracle happened, that the known number of fish species in the world was 153. Commentators say that the fact that the disciples caught 153 fish was tantamount to the Lord telling them that their spiritual nets would catch all kinds of people: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). The book of Revelation confirms that this is fulfilled: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9,10).

b. St. Augustine proposed another interpretation of this number. The figure 10 symbolises the ten commandments, and 7 symbolises perfect grace of the Holy Spirit. If we add the number of commandments to the perfect grace of the Holy Spirit, we get the figure 17. The numbers from 1+2+3...+17=153. This number then represents all who are brought to God under every dispensation of grace. Augustine said that this symbolises all

the elect of the Old and the New Testament, the elect of the covenant of the Law and the elect of the covenant of grace.

c. The net thrown into the sea catching good and bad fish (Matthew 13:47-49) illustrates the visible Church with all the people in it. Of these some are believers and others are not. This net, however, which caught 153 good fish, symbolises the invisible Church, whose members are all sanctified true believers. On the last day this net, full of believers, will be dragged up and no one will be lost from it! So the whole Church will be perfect "That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

5. They recognised Him:

When the disciples had caught the fish, they knew Him. The first one who knew was John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Peter was the first who jumped into the water in order to meet Christ! We notice the difference between the gifts of the apostles: John had the gift of acquaintance by his heart because of his intimate knowledge of the Lord. He could distinguish Jesus' voice and work. Peter, on the other hand, rushed into action, throwing himself, body and soul, towards Christ, swimming in the water. The Lord gives gifts to everyone according to His choice and what is good in His eyes, for the perfection of the saints for the work of the ministry, that the Body of Christ might be built up. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:4).

6. They learned:

a. The disciples came to understand that night that without Christ they could catch nothing. We need to understand that without Christ, it is impossible for us to catch souls. We fail when we try to do something in our own strength, with our own intelligence, according to our own arrangements, with our own potentials and the best of our management skills. We learn with the disciples the

lesson of that night of failure and that morning of success. We learn that without Him we can do nothing, but with Him we can do all things because He gives us strength (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13).

b. The dragging of the net to the shore reminds us of what happened to us the day Christ dragged us out of the waters of perdition to the shore of safety in the new life with Him. This is what happened to three thousand souls, whom the net of the Gospel (the Good News) attracted on the day of Pentecost, dragging them into the Church. This is what we see in every meeting where the lost souls come to know the Great Shepherd of souls, our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. The dragging of the net to the shore reminds us of the last day, when the good ®sh will be gathered into vessels, but the bad will be thrown away (Matthew 13:47-50). On the shore of eternity, every one of us will have to account for himself.

What is your lot going to be?

II. CHRIST AND THE MIRACLE

1. Christ opens the conversation with them:

``Children, do you have any food?" (vs. 5). Food here means what is eaten with bread. Christ meant fish. Christ took the initiative in His contact with the disciples. When we committed our lives to the Lord and experienced the new life, He had the initiative. It was His love that reached out from on high to save us from our sins. It took our hand into His and raised us up, thereby leading us to salvation.

The Lord's hand still reaches out in endless mercy. He waits for us to stretch out our hand to receive the blessing prepared for us ``I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:13). When we receive it, He will say to us: ``Until

now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

2. Christ, the One who knows everything:

``Children, do you have any food?" (vs. 5). He always pin-points our need exactly. Whatever the need is, He knows it before we ask Him. He meets every need and rescues from every tribulation and failure. He gives in abundance for us to enjoy.

When the disciples answered that they had no food, He said, ``Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (vs. 6). These were experts, specialists in fishing, having spent their whole life at the Sea of Galilee. But they did not know where to find fish. But He is the One who knows the need and where to find what they need! When we hear His voice and agree to what He says and wait for His directions to us, He shows us where to find the blessing we need! Try yourself to obtain His blessing.

3. Christ, the loving, tender One:

The disciples were exhausted from working all night. They were hungry in the morning. The world had given them nothing. But Christ, the loving One, gave them an abundant catch of fish from the lake. When they had come to land, they found ``a fire of coals there and fish laid on it and bread" (vs. 9). This was really a token of love to the tired disciples!

This means that Christ thought of all their immediate needs in every way. He took into His consideration all the specifics of what they needed in the long run. When we reach a time and an area of need, we find that He has already prepared everything in advance in a much better way than we had asked for and thought of!

The psalmist asks: ``Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" (Psalm 78:19). We ask the same question. Is not life itself a desert!

The answer comes to us from God's mercy and loving-kindness. What God did for His prophet Elijah is an example of this. When

this hero of a prophet was in a weak position, confronted with the evil queen Jezebel, he ran away from the danger zone to the wilderness. The Lord took pity on him and sent him an angel with food: ``Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him and said, `Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.' So he arose, and ate and drank" (1 Kings 19:1-9). This meal strengthened him so that he could go back to Mount Horeb.

It is possible for you to feel God's love and tenderness towards you if you surrender the control over your life to Him.

4. Jesus respects our self-esteem:

After the disciples had seen the fish on the embers and the bread, Christ told them, ``Bring some of the fish which you have just caught" (vs. 10). This He did to make them feel that they had really accomplished something! The Lord gives to us when we are unable, but He wants us to feel accomplishment and self-esteem. He encourages us to present to Him what He has already given us. David understood this truth, for He said to the Lord, ``All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You" (1 Chronicles 29:14). True enough, God does everything, but He wants us to be partners with Him in what He does, in order that we may respect ourselves and have self-confidence.

Verse 13 says, ``Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish." When we are reluctant to come forward to Him, He comes forward to us, and He presents to us what we need, so that we may feel secure and find safety.

5. Christ teaches us:

a. Without Him we can find no satisfaction.

b. Our hearts burn with love for Him when we understand His love and might.