THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER

EPIPHANY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Gerhard Grabenhofer

Matthew 8:1-13 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 50. This account takes after our Lord's Sermon on the Mount when "the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." (Matthew 7:28-29) "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." (Matthew 4:23)

1 **When [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.**

- After the Sermon on the Mount, where He had taught with authority and astonished the crowds [7:28-29], Jesus would now confirm the word He spoke with mighty works. By coming down, He not only showed Himself as the great Teacher of Israel but also her Helper who could and would help in all troubles. Jesus does not live in an ivory tower but in the realities of life in this sin contaminated world. He is not aloof from the sufferings caused by sin. They touch Him, but He touches them. This is a reflection of the Incarnation.

2 **And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."**

- St. Luke (5:12) describes the man as in an advanced state of leprosy. How horribly God's creation was now deformed. Here is a physical manifestation of the inner spiritual condition of all people as they come into the world. Because a leper was separated from the community, he was also separated from the temple and synagogue, where God's Word would be proclaimed. Although breaking the law by approaching Jesus, faith moved him to approach Jesus. Perhaps he had heard from others about Jesus, or maybe at a distance he had heard Jesus preach.
- Because this is a temporal blessing, faith moves him to pray "if". In the humility of faith he leaves the decision to Jesus. He doubts neither Jesus' mercy nor His ability but leaves the whole matter in His hands

3 **And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.**

- Note the connection to the Collect: "stretch forth the right hand of Your majesty to help and defend us." By touching him, Jesus' mercy and compassion triumph over the law.
- Jesus heals him by His own authority.
- Jesus was not defiled by touching the leper but the leper was made pure. Again there is a reflection of the incarnation: Jesus became man, touched our sinful nature, yet He Himself remained free from the stain/ touch of sin.
- We also see a reflection of the Holy Supper where Jesus stretches forth His hand to us giving us His body and blood and our sin/leprosy is cleansed.

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4 **And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them."**

- We never leave Jesus' presence without Him achieving His purpose. By forbidding the cleansed leper from saying anything, Jesus was not only trying to prevent false worldly Messianic notions from spreading, but He wanted the man to ponder and reflect on what He had done. We, too, do well to ponder the blessings of God we have experienced.
- By following the Law of Moses in Leviticus 14, the miracle is proved as having happened. The man would again be received into fellowship with the community and temple.

5 **When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,**

- The leper was an Israelite; the centurion a Gentile but one who knew God. St. Matthew is, beginning with the Wise Men, very keen on showing Gentile believers.

6 **"Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."**

- Notice that this is not a request but a statement of need, relying on Jesus' mercy that He would do the right thing.

7 **And he said to him, "I will come and heal him."** 8 **But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.**

- By his response, the centurion doesn't look to his own unworthiness but to Jesus' mercy. Faith becomes strong in humility, recognizing we are not worthy of God's grace but still hopes for it, relying on God's Word and promise of grace. Faith recognizes that God's grace is for the unworthy and undeserving. Through His Word—as in the Gospel and absolution—Jesus shows His divine strength and power.

9 **For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."**

- The centurion is not boasting but giving honor to Jesus. He is, in effect, saying: if I, a mere man have a powerful word, how much more powerful is Your Word—the Word of the true God.

10 **When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.**

- Joy and sorrow are mixed together in Jesus' statement.

11 **I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,**

- Jesus' words are a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles. This centurion is one of the first fruits of the Gentile world. A theme of the Epiphany season is world missions.

12 **while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

- Here is Jesus' sorrow and warning against unbelief, carnal security, and ingratitude.
- Here in this warning, is the opposite of what we saw with the leper. He was healed so he could have communion with God. But when people reject Jesus, the only thing awaiting them is hell, which is being cast from the presence of and communion with God.
- The spiritual and emotional pain and anger in the torment of hell.

13 **And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.**

- Here is the reward of faith. Clinging to Jesus, faith receives His help, comfort, mercy and every good. It wants and hopes for nothing other than what the word promises.

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