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SERMON: HEALINGS OF BODY AND SOUL

(7TH Matt. 9:27-35, Rom 15:1-7), July/29/2011)

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Veronis

A day or week does not pass without hearing of someone who has cancer, a serious heart problem, or a critical health issue. Or of someone who simply makes a request for prayer for a physical illness. As Christians, we naturally respond with our prayers for healing.

A major part of Jesus's ministry dealt with healing. The Evangelist Matthew relates five miraculous healings by the hands of Jesus just in chapter 9:

- (a) the healing of the **woman** with an long-standing **hemorrhage**,
- (b) the healing and raising up of the **ruler's daughter**,
- (c) the healing of the **two blind men**,
- (d) the **healing** of a **paralytic**.
- (e) the healing of a **mute** man who received his speech back
- (f) and the comment about how Jesus "**went about all the cities and villages.. healing every sickness and every disease among the people.**" (Matt. 9)

5 mentions of healings! Do you see why it is important for us to pray for each other when we learn that someone is sick?

Obviously healing comes to us thru physicians and the medical community. But it also comes from the spiritual support we receive from the prayers, love, support, encouragement we give to each other.

"Your phone calls and prayers meant so much during my illness and recovery," people will often say.

"Please put an announcement in 'THE ANNUNCIATOR' thanking all those who prayed for and remembered me during my illness and recovery", parishioners request.

During the times Presvytera Pearl and I were ill and hospitalized, we felt very deeply the prayers of parishioners, friends and family.

Just to know that people cared for and loved us, sent cards, letters, flowers, or showed some gesture of concern helped in our recovery.

Some years ago when I was hospitalized for kidney stones for a week, there was a young cleaning woman who came in every day and asked with genuine concern, "**How are you today, Father? Better I hope! Is there anything I can do for you?**" More than just the words, which were a comfort in themselves, was the sincerity with which she spoke. She conveyed the feeling that she really cared. I never forgot her.

Several years later, I met her in the hospital again, but she was not dressed as a cleaning woman. As we chatted and I thanked her again for the genuine concern she had expressed during my hospitalization, she happily announced that she was presently enrolled in nursing school preparing to become a nurse. "**With your compassion and genuine love for people you will become a great nurse!**", I responded.

This week we remembered Saint Panteleimon the Great Martyr and Healer. He lived at the time of the Emperor Diocletian, the last of the fanatical persecutors of Christians. Diocletian put St. Panteleimon to terrible tortures and finally beheaded him in 303 A.D. because he would not bow down to the pagan idols, nor acknowledge Diocletian as divine.

Panteleimon, a physician by training, whose name comes from two Greek words, "panta" and "eleimon", which mean "**THE ALL MERCIFUL ONE**", is a saint the Church greatly reveres. He had the God-given gift of "spiritual healing". He conducted a powerful healing ministry in the name of Jesus Christ, and the Church has remembered him through the ages.

Saint Nektarios of Aegina, a 20th century saint greatly revered in Greece and throughout the Orthodox Church, whose icon we have on the back wall, also had the gift of healing. Thousands still flock to his shrine on the island of Aegina to seek his prayers and to venerate his memory.

This should not surprise us. Jesus's ministry emphasized spiritual healings. His very first words when he began his public ministry in Nazareth, his home town, were: **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."** (Luke 4:18-19) (Isaiah 49:8,9; 61:1-2).

St. Luke, the gospel writer, records of Jesus, "The report went around concerning Jesus...and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities,".

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he were **"the Coming One, or do we look for another?"**

Jesus answered, **"Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them..."** (Luke 7:20-22).

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One might say, **"That is all well and good, but Jesus was Jesus, the Incarnate God, how can we ever do such things!?"**

However, Jesus told his disciples that they would be able to do even greater miracles than he did. And when he blessed them and commissioned them to go out and spread the gospel, here is what he said: **"As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise**

the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give." (Matt. 10:7,8)

Throughout the centuries, disciples of Jesus have performed great healing feats in his name by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

St. James exhorts us to promote the healing ministry in the Church.

"Are any among you sick?", he writes, "Let them call for the elders (presbyters) of the church, and let them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up. And if they have committed sins, they will be forgiven." (James 5:14-15). The Sacrament of Holy Unction (Healing) originates from this passage.

What about people we pray for who do not get well?

Obviously that happens also. We believe that we live every moment of our brief lives in the hands of God. Whether we live or die, we know and believe that God loves us. Whenever we pray, we say at the end...***"if it is your will..."*** as Jesus said in Gethsemane when he asked that **the cup of suffering** be spared him. However, he ended by saying what we also need to remember: ***"Lord, not my will but yours be done!"***

Moreover, healing may come in **our attitude and spiritual outlook**, if not in our body. **A spiritual healing** helps us to accept even death with serenity and hope.

Let us pray with confidence that **whether we live or die**, whether we receive an immediate healing or not, **we live in God's providence**, ready to accept whatever his will decides.

Jesus was not spared the cup of suffering and crucifixion.

St. Panteleimon was not spared a martyr's death.

St. Nektarios, himself a great healer, died of cancer. But all faced death with hope in God's eternal kingdom.

May we, too, always pray with that same hope and say with the Scriptures, "***Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's possession.***"

(Hebrews 10:34) **AMEN.**