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HEALING MIRACLES PERFORMED BY CHRIST – A SYMBOL OF MAN’S REDEMPTION

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Abstract

Each time, we find it very difficult to understand the real cause of suffering and this happens because illness and suffering hurt the individual in his most intimate experience. The suffering man must experience inner conflict: how he must understand himself. We are aware that God is not the cause of our evil and suffering, but they must be allowed by Providence. The persistent question lingers: why does God allow man, the most beautiful of all creatures, to wallow in misfortune, suffering, pain and death? Throughout all the New Testament, the experience of healing and recovering from various illnesses, as well as forgiving sins, certify Christ’s salvation work, eventually accomplished by death and resurrection. All instances of healing physical illnesses that the Saviour performs are a forerunner of His salvation work achieved by His sacrifice on the Cross. Therein lies the great sacrament: Christ, crucified on the Cross, overcomes suffering and pain by His own suffering and pain. If until the Resurrection suffering and illnesses were only cured by the manifestation of divine power, Resurrection bestows a new dimension upon suffering, which is transfigured, in that it becomes triumph.

Keywords: healing, miracle, sacrament, salvation, illness, suffering;

1. INTRODUCTION

The Holy Scripture shares with us, in an impressive icon, God’s love to man, even if man does not always understand the way this love manifests itself. The Old Testament, deeply indebted to the retributive mentality, any deed has its reward, gradually leads us to discovering the Messiah by its remarkable personalities: Abraham, Joseph, Moses and particularly Job, an icon of the suffering of the innocent one, prefiguration of Christ who, by assuming human form [S. Ioannes Damascenus, 1864, 1071], comes to vanquish suffering by eradicating its cause: sin.

2. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE ISSUE OF SUFFERING

One of the most powerful key concepts in the Teachings of Christ the Saviour is precisely overcoming the Old Testament mentality: there is no punishment without sin, where there is suffering, sin came first [Grelot, 1986, 27]. Friends of Job, embracing this very traditional way of thinking, share the



Benthamite belief according to which virtue breeds happiness, and sin causes suffering [Spinsanti, 1990, 185; Popescu, 1935, 14]. The Old Testament does not lack in texts preaching this connection between sin and suffering, which must be interpreted in their Biblical context. Thus, the illness of Saul, king of the Jews (1 Samuel 16, 14); the illness of Gehazi, Elisha's servant 4 kings, 5, 27); the illness and healing of king Ezechiel (2 kings 20, 1-11); the illness and death of Alchimos during the Makabim time (1 Makabim 9, 54-56); the illness and death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2 Makabim 9, 11-12); the illness and death of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4, 28-30), etc. All these Biblical places speak of the same mentality, present in the Book of Job and during the entire Old Testament period: the greater the sin, the greater the punishment, so that suffering turns into acknowledgement of sin [Spinsanti, 1990, 185].

3. THE HEALING PERFORMED BY CHRIST – SYMBOL OF THE NEW VOW

The Jews during the Saviour's time were also indebted to this mentality. We find this very concept with the healing of the blind since birth (John 9): "*And His followers asked Him, saying: Teacher, who sinned, this one or his parents, since he was born blind?*" The same as with the Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate when they were presenting their offering, or in the case of other 18 Jews that were crushed to death by the falling tower of Siloam, the Saviour refuses to accept death as punishment for their sins. *And there were people present who told Him of the Galileans whose blood Pilat had mixed with that of their offering. And answering, He said: Do you somehow believe that these Galileans were more sinful than all Galileans, because they underwent this? No! I tell you; but if you do not repent, you shall all die the same. Or those 18 people, crushed to death by the Siloam tower, do you believe them to have been more sinful than all people living in Jerusalem? No! I tell you; but if you do not repent, you shall all die the same*" (Lc. 13, 1-5). In reversed logics, we can talk about the fact that gaining eternal life does not depend on bearing suffering and illness, but on kindness and virtue, as we can see in the Story of the poor Lazarus and the merciless rich man (Lc. 16, 19-31). S. John Chrysostom says in this respect: "*Lazarus underwent nine types of suffering on earth not to be punished, but to become better. Which is exactly what happened.*" [S. John Chrysostom, 2005, 42]. The Saviour's Gospel is just as firm in this regard of the connection between suffering and sin: to the extent to which the illness and suffering of the righteous is a sacrament, we cannot conclude that it was brought about by sin. *Jesus answered: Neither did he, nor did his parents sin, so that God's work might become manifest in him.*" (John 9, 2-3). However, if we think about the Healing of the paralytic in Capernaum (Marcus 2, 1-12), as well as of the Healing of the invalid at the bath in Bethesda (John 5, 1-15), where we might make a cause and effect connection between sin and suffering and where we might find it is a contradiction, well, according to S. John Chrysostom, all healing miracles performed by Christ must also be read from the perspective of man's redemption, of mankind's redemption for God's Kingdom. "*He showed each and everybody - S. John Chrysostom says – that sins had been the cause of their illnesses. And in the very beginning, in the beginning of the world, sin had been the cause of illness...*" [S. John Chrysostom, 2005, 287]. Theology tried to clarify this contradiction, explaining it by means of consequences of the ancestral sin in the nature of man. and, from this point of view, the therapeutical work of Christ is an integral part of the salvation work of mankind. S. Matthew the Evangelist is the one to thus sum up the Saviour's mission: "*And Jesus walked throughout the Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom and healing all the illness and the weakness in the people. And word of Him spread throughout Syria, and they would bring before Him all who were suffering, afflicted by many types of illnesses and torments, the possessed, the lunatic, the invalid, and He would cure them all*" (Matthew 4, 23-24). S. Luca the Ev. Supports the same idea when he creates the solemn context in which Jesus Christ the Saviour begins His activity announcing in the synagogue in Nazareth the sabbatical anniversary which foretold the eschatological redemption foreseen by prophets: "*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been raised, and, according to His custom, He went into the synagogue on Saturday and He rose to read. He was given the book of prophet Isaiah. And, opening the book, He found the part where it was written: «God's Holy Spirit is upon Me, for which He anointed Me to tell the poor the good news; He sent Me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach freedom to the enslaved and sight to the blind; to relieve the burdened. And to talk about the year that God is pleased with». And, closing the book and giving it to the servant, He sat down, and everyone's eyes were upon Him. And He started telling them: Today this Scripture is fulfilled before you.*" The healing performed by Christ on a Sabbatical day causing scandal among the legalist

Pharisee necessarily align along announcing this great sabbatical Jubilee, at the same time becoming a symbol of the New Vow inaugurated my Messianic times. The illnesses and suffering of the various people Christ heals usually display this function of a sign, a symbol of God's work manifesting itself: "*Neither did he, nor did his parents sin, so that God's work might become manifest in him*" (John 9, 3). The blind man in Jerusalem getting blind is here presented as an opportunity for God to bestow His grace on man. Yet, what is characteristic to these miraculous healing instances performed by Christ the Saviour, and which are not meant to be a simple re-balancing of bodily health and equilibrium, is precisely the fact that they represent the arrival of a new moral order as a manifestation of faith in Jesus Christ. That is why healing is often connected to forgiving sins as a consequence of faith. S. Cyril of Jerusalem, commenting on the healing of the paralytic in Capernaum, says that "*such is the power of the virtue of faith that the faithful is not the only one to experience redemption, but some experience it by means of other people's faith*" [S. Cyril of Jerusalem, 1885, 515]. Faith in Christ is not just some random trust in His power to perform a miracle, but it is foremost that faith that entails salvation, discovery and experience of knowing God. That is why the Saviour cannot be assimilated to any curer or healer because He heals the entire man, body and soul, as S. Cyril of Jerusalem says again: "*Jesus, as the Jews call the Saviour, means doctor in Greek. For He is the doctor of our souls and bodies*" [S. Cyril of Jerusalem, 1886, 678]. By Embodiment, the Son of God assumes His whole humanity with its corresponding suffering and shortcomings, except for sin as a means to relieve suffering, to heal and entirely deliver man from evil, illness and suffering. On the one hand, miraculous healing is a sign of divine power becoming manifest, and, on the other, the Calvary, the Cross and Death suffered are signs of voidance, of real descent to the human condition, and both the sigh of obedience to the Father. The meaning of Christ's Calvary and suffering do not represent the Father's punishment, but obedience and love for the Father. Christ Himself suffers abandonment, pain leading to death on the Cross, having complete, resolute faith in the Father's will. From this perspective, the Cross is not a symbol of pain, but of communication within obeying the Father. The suffering of the Son of God should thus be understood as originating in love and not the other way around [Chiodi, 2006, 357].

During His life on earth, Christ never tried to explain suffering, but, on the contrary, He had a compassionate attitude towards man experiencing suffering. And this compassion for the suffering man is not random compassion, but God's mercy in His role as a doctor capable of healing, or rather saving, both body and soul [Cascone, 2008, 259]. We can say that Christ's whole salvation work is a work of healing the entire individual who, through faith, receives a new life. Faith in Christ is the compulsory condition to achieve the healing miracle, as the Evangelist saints say in their accounts of healing the blind, the paralytic, the possessed, the leprous, etc. performed by Christ, but above them all, faith is the prerequisite that entails redemption [Chiodi, 2006, 354].

4. CHRIST'S PERSONA – THE PROTOTYPE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

Throughout all the New Testament, the experience of healing and becoming healthier after various illnesses, as well as forgiving sins, are a proof of Christ's salvation work, eventually achieved by dying and resurrecting [Chiodi, 2006, 355]. All the physical healing performed by the Saviour foretells His redemption work achieved by His sacrifice on the Cross. And herein lies the great Sacrament: Christ crucified on the Cross defeats suffering and pain through His own suffering and pain. If until the Resurrection suffering and illnesses were only relieved by the manifestation of the divine power, through Resurrection suffering is granted a new dimension, being transfigured, in that it becomes triumph [Moldovan, 2008, 86].

Christ's persona is the prototype of every Christian faced with illness, suffering and pain. Christ embodied, suffered, was crucified and died not to eradicate suffering, but to transfigure it as obedience. As He was obedient towards the Father until the Calvary, Cross and Death, so must every Christian, by means of virtue and the Holy Sacraments, mortify any tendency to sin. S. Maximus the Confessor says that the Saviour "*celebrates obedience by His nature and experiences it by suffering, not only to save all through His own, cleansing it of all evil, but also to taste our obedience, learning our own, He who encompasses all knowledge, discovering what is asked of us and what we are forgiven for in connection with complete obedience, which brings the saved to the Father. How great and how filled with awe truly is the sacrament of our redemption*" [S. Maximus the Confessor, 1865, 1046BC]. For the Holy Fathers,

the persona of Christ the Saviour is a living reality in the life of the believer, manifested in the continuous and complete action of the Holy Spirit within the Holy Sacraments. Only to the extent to which this reality is lived as such by the believer during his life here, only to this extent can he gain access to God's Kingdom in heaven and achieve union to God [S. Simon the New Theologist, 1999, 338].

Christ reveals God by His humanity and being He Himself God, He shows us the way to salvation by inserting obedience to Him into our suffering, as a way of meeting God [Staniloae, 1983, 54]. Jesus Christ, by Embodiment, assumed human form, but in this form we are all embodied spiritually, and, by the sacrifice and the divine rendering of the human nature in Christ, we were all sacrificed and virtually rendered divine. Thus, our personal or subjective redemption means each of us should assume what we already have within in Christ. The way we grasp ourselves within Christ surpasses any reasonable understanding, remaining a great mystery.

Redemption is thus possible due to the fact that, in His human form, Christ revises the entire creation: heaven and the inhabited world, the skies and the earth, the sensitive and the intelligible, all outside of rot and sin. The same way in which through the old Adam all nature becomes sinful and suffering, through the new Adam, Christ, all nature is restored and acquires its entire Paradise glow. If, within Adam, all nature suffers from illness and rot, because of disobedience, the same way, within Christ, it regains health due to its obedience [S. Cyril of Alexandria, 1863, 790B].

We are encompassed within Christ because He embraced the human nature and revised in Himself the entire humanity, becoming the new Adam. The fall of mankind through Adam and Eve's fall had to be resolved by raising all mankind. Christ, in His salvation action, grants redemption to all people of all times forever.

Man's personal redemption is a continuation of what Christ virtually started. In this respect, Christ suffered with His face both towards God and towards mankind. By means of His suffering, He freed us from the curse and rendered us divine: "*as all die within Adam, so will they all resurrect within Christ*" (I Corinthians 15, 22). If through Adam we inherit the consequences of the ancestral sin, which are passed down to us as being prone to sin, the same way, virtually, by secret union to Christ, we achieve redemption. By virtue of our communion with Christ, we all find ourselves within Him.

5. THE HOLY SACRAMENTS – MEANS OF HEALING AND ACHIEVING REDEMPTION

Through the Holy Sacraments, we keep alive the path the Saviour accomplished to ensure our salvation. All Sacraments more or less display the aspects of sacrifice and Sacrament. Because, with each Sacrament, Christ sacrifices Himself for us, and He offers Himself, along with us, to the Father as sacrifice, so that our sins might be forgiven and we might gain eternal life. All Sacraments are connected to Christ's sacrifice and, within all, we receive the power to sacrifice ourselves out of Christ's sacrifice [Staniloae, 1997, 72].

The sacrifice state can be accessed by Baptism. The Neophyte is enlightened by Christ, he is a new creature endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, received during Unction, and this new life develops and grows through the Eucharistic. Within this "initiation," the Holy Sacraments are not mere signs, but the "origins of rebirth" - ἀναγενεσις [Evdokimov, 1996, 140]. Within salvation, Christ's humanity creates a new humanity where He also includes us.

6. CONCLUSION

Christ's work as a human being started at His birth by Virgin Mary and continued up to the accomplishment of His human self by Resurrection and Ascension. There are different stages in this progressive state of His redeeming life: the baptism, the temptation, the Gethsemane garden, and particularly the cross. Each part of Christ's life means assuming fallen humanity with a view to healing it from within. Yet, Christ accomplishes all these within His own divine-human self for any man as potential fulfillment. Just as Adam had immortality as opportunity in Paradise, the Christian on "via Crucis" is granted potential access to the eternal kingdom. S. Gregory of Nazianzus expresses this truth saying that the Calvary, the Death and the resurrection of Christ have become healing medicine for all the illnesses of the human nature, "bringing the old Adam out of his fallen state, back next to the tree of life" [S. Gregorius Theologus, 1857, 435]. The Holy Fathers' oriental Theology [S. Ioannes Damascenus,

1864, 790-1226; S. Maximus the Confessor, 1864, 632BC] says that, in His human form, through all His divine-human actions, Christ not only restored the old Adam's nature, but He also continued God the Father's eternal plan for the first man, plan which was interrupted by Adam's fall, namely that He managed to render the human nature divine as potential achievement for each Christian.

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- [7] San Gregorius Theologus, *Oratio II*, 25, in JP. Migne, PG., vol. 35, 1857, col. 407 -514, here col. 435: "Haec omnia divinae cuiusdam erga nos disciplinae loco erant, infirmitatisque nostrae velut medicina quaedam, veterum Adamum eo, unde exciderant, reducens, et ad illud vitae lignum adducens."
- [8] S. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis V. De fide et Symbolo*, 8, in JP. Migne, PG., vol. 33, 1885, col. 505-525, here col. 515 "Tantum porro virum habet fides, ut non solum ille qui credit salvus efficiatur, verum etiam per aliorum fidem alii salventur"
- [9] S. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis X. De Uno Domino Jesu Christo*, 13, in JP. Migne, PG., vol. 33, 1886, col. 659-689, here col. 678: "Jesu itaque juxta Hebraeos Salvatorem sonat, in lingua vero Graeca eum qui sanat. Quandoquidem animarum est et corporum medicus, et spirituum curator".
- [10] S. Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, V, 18-19, in JP. Migne, PG., vol. 74, 1863, col. 774-854, here col. 790B: "Sicut igitur humana in Adamo natura, ob inobedientiam, corruptionis infirmitatem nacta est, et passiones eam invaserunt, sic eadem postea Christum liberata est, qui obediens Deo Patri fuit et peccatum non commisit".
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- [12] S. John Chrysostom, *Omilii la săracul Lazăr [Homilies to Poor Lazarus]*, Bucharest: Biblical Institute, 2005, 378p.
- [13] S. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum Liber*, 4, in JP. Migne, PG., vol. 91, 1865, col.1031-1417, here col 1046BC: "Hoc modo obedientiam in honore afficit Dominus, et eius experientiam perpetendis malis capit, non tantum ut salvet nos, totam a vitio purgando naturam, verum etiam ut expoloret nostram obedientiam, et nostra omnia intelligat experiendo, qui alias omnem cognitionem sua natura complectitur; ita nimirum dispiceret quantum et a nobis exigi aequum foret, et quantum condonari, ad perfectam obedientiam; per hac enim eos suo Patri adducere solet qui salute digni videbantur. Quam magnum, quam vere tremendum est nostrae salutis mysterium!"
- [14] S. Maximus the Confessor, *Răspunsuri către Talasie [Answers to Tallassee]*, Questiones [Questions], 61, PG., vol. 90, 1864, col. 626D-646C, here col. 632BC: "Deus igitur vere homo factus est, alianque naturae secundi ortus dedit originem, laborum compedio in futurae vitae desinentem voluptatem. Quemadmodum enim primus parens Adamus, qua divinum transgressus mandatum est, aliam ortus originem ex voluptate ac libidine consistentem, atque in mortem intermedio labore aerumanque desinentem, contra ac se prima habebat, consilio sequiore induxerat, ac serpentis suasu, voluptatem anteriori labori non succedentem, sed quae ipsa potius,

in laborem aerumnamque cederet, adinvenerat; [...] sic et Dominus factus homo, atque aliam secundi ortus originem ex Spiritu Sancto naturae fabricatus, justissimamque Adami, quae labore aerumnaque consciscitur, suscipiens mortem, quae in eo utique iniquissima fuerit, ea scilicet ratione, quod ortus sui originem, iniquissimam ex primi parentis transgressione voluptatem atque libidem, minime nacta sit.” [God truly became man and He established another origin for the world for its second birth, an origin that He leads work and pain to future joy. As our first father, Adam, disobeying the divine commandment, gave the world a foreign origin when compared with the original one, which consisted in the pleasure of the voluptuous and which lead to death by pain; and he lent his ear to the whispered advice of the snake, pleasure that was not caused by prior pain, but which led to pain. [...] Yet, the same way, by embodiment, God established a different origin for a second birth within the Holy Spirit and He did away with both extremes. With the origin and the end of the human nature after Adam, as some that had not been given in the beginning.]

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