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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

The Fourth Sunday of Zemene Tsom (*The Season of Lent*)

Liturgical Readings:

Gal. 5:1 – end; James 5: 14-end; Acts 3: 1 -12

Psalm 41:3-4;

John 2:1—25

The Anaphora of Our Lord

He Gave Rest to the Sick on the Sabbath

“The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness. I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee” (Psalm 41:3–4).

Beloved in Christ, grace and peace be unto you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Psalmist speaks with tender confidence of a God who draws near to the afflicted, who does not abandon the sick upon their bed, but strengthens them in weakness and restores them with mercy. In these sacred words, bodily frailty and spiritual repentance are held together: healing is sought not only for the flesh, but for the soul that has sinned and longs for mercy. From the Ethiopian Orthodox theological inheritance, shaped by Scripture, the Fathers, and lived liturgy, sickness is never viewed in isolation from the mystery of salvation. The God who heals the body is the same Lord who forgives sin and restores humanity to communion with Himself.

Throughout the Old Testament, the LORD reveals Himself as the One who sees the suffering of His people and intervenes with compassion. The Sabbath itself was given as a gift of rest, a sign of God’s covenantal care, reminding Israel that life does not depend solely upon human labour but upon divine mercy. To rest on the Sabbath was to trust in God’s sustaining power, especially in times of weakness and affliction. Thus, when the Psalmist declares that the LORD “will make all his bed in his sickness,” he proclaims a God who attends personally to the suffering faithful, turning the place of pain into a place of divine visitation.

This promise finds its fullest fulfilment in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, who repeatedly healed the sick on the Sabbath, revealing its true purpose. The Gospels present before us the blind, the paralysed, the fevered, and the broken, many of whom had lain long upon beds of suffering, excluded and forgotten. Yet Christ approached them not with condemnation, but with mercy, authority, and restoring power. He gave rest to the sick on the Sabbath, not as a violation of God’s law, but as its perfect fulfilment.

Consider the man sick of the palsy, borne by four companions and lowered through the roof before Jesus. On seeing their faith, our Lord first declared, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee,” and then commanded, “Arise, take up thy bed, and walk” (Mark 2:3–12). This healing, which scandalised the scribes, revealed that the Sabbath is not opposed to mercy, but exists for it. The man who had been bound to his bed rose in freedom, carrying the very sign of his former affliction as a testimony to divine grace.

Likewise, in the synagogue, our Lord encountered the man with the withered hand. Knowing the hardness of heart of those who watched Him, Jesus asked, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or

to kill?” (Mark 3:4). When He healed the man, restoring his hand, He exposed the blindness of those who valued rigid observance above human restoration. Here, the true blindness was not physical, but spiritual—a refusal to recognise the Lord of the Sabbath standing in their midst.

The Gospels further recount the healing of the blind, whose darkness Christ dispelled with divine authority. Two blind men cried out by the roadside, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David,” and Jesus touched their eyes, restoring their sight according to their faith (Matthew 20:29–34). Another blind man, healed in John 9, received sight on the Sabbath, provoking fierce opposition from the religious authorities. Yet as his physical eyes were opened, his spiritual vision also grew, until he confessed faith in the Son of Man. These healings proclaim that the Sabbath is a day of illumination, when God opens eyes long darkened by suffering and sin.

We recall also the centurion whose servant lay grievously tormented. Though a soldier of the occupying power, he approached Christ with humility and faith, saying, “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matthew 8). Our Lord marvelled at such faith and granted healing at a distance, showing that divine authority is not limited by place or status. In every case, Christ’s healing power reveals the compassionate reign of God breaking into human affliction.

The Jewish leaders, however, repeatedly challenged Him: “Who gave thee this authority?” In response, Jesus testified that His works bore witness to His identity. He healed, delivered, and restored sight to the blind because He was sent by the Father, anointed by the Spirit, and endowed with divine authority. As He made clear, He was not abolishing the Sabbath, but revealing its heart. He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and in Him the Sabbath becomes a day of liberation rather than burden.

The Acts of the Apostles continue this witness. At the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, Peter and John encountered a man lame from birth, laid daily at the gate to beg. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Peter commanded him to rise and walk, and immediately his feet were strengthened (Acts 3:1–12). This healing, like those of Christ, directed all glory to God and confirmed that the risen Lord continues His work of restoration through His Church.

Saint James instructs the faithful, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him... and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up” (James 5:14–15). Healing is thus placed within the life of the Church, bound to prayer, repentance, forgiveness, and communal care. Saint Paul likewise teaches that Christ has set us free for liberty, not for self-indulgence, but for love expressed in service (Galatians 5). True freedom in Christ manifests itself in acts of mercy, compassion, and healing.

Beloved, the witness of Scripture is clear: the Lord cured the blind, raised the paralysed, healed the sick, and relieved suffering on the Sabbath. He restored health and dignity precisely on the day appointed for rest, revealing that the Sabbath belongs to the Lord of mercy. He fulfilled what needed to be done on the Sabbath without breaking its law, for love is the law’s fulfilment.

Therefore, as Christians, we are called to imitate our Lord. The Sabbath is not merely a cessation from labour, but an opportunity for holy action. We are summoned to visit the sick, to comfort the afflicted, to remember the imprisoned, and to share the life-giving word of God. In doing so, we participate in the healing rest that Christ offers, extending His compassion into a wounded world.

May the LORD, who strengthens the sick upon their bed, heal our bodies and our souls. May He grant us eyes to see suffering, hearts moved by mercy, and hands ready to serve. And may we ever honour the Sabbath by deeds of love, until the day when all sickness and sorrow are finally overcome in His eternal Kingdom.

Glory to the Almighty God!