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Jean Read

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And Jesus Had Compassion on the Multitudes . . .

JEAN READ



WE GROW thoughtful regarding the Miracles of Our Lord during His public life, and the number of times the Gospels make mention of His concern for the sick is cause for wonderment. "Signs" were constantly demanded as proof of His divinity. Everywhere He went was the clamor, "Give us a sign . . ." Many would not believe in Him otherwise. He must have been deeply hurt at this continual demand, but the sick and the infirm knew His great compassion and through them He manifested to those insistent doubters the power that was His alone.

Artists have touched brush to paintings of "Christ Healing the Sick" and prayers have been written in numbers to ask His help for those ill of many diseases.

Those whose lives are dedicated to caring for the sick can take comfort in Our Lord's great concern for the unfortunate and can be

Miss Read is Assistant Editor of this journal.

called "Other Christs" for His sake.

St. Matthew was the first of the Evangelists who wrote the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the freshness of this first writing that had appeal for your scribe and the reason for choosing this Gospel to follow Our Lord in "going among the people and doing good."

A reading reveals that no less than thirty times there is mention of sickness in some form, either of the body or of the spirit. The first simple statement occurs soon after He began calling together His Apostles. He had left Nazareth and come to dwell in Capharnaum. Walking by the sea of Galilee, Peter and Andrew were the first invited to "leave their nets to follow Him." James and John likewise "left the mending of their nets and father and followed Him." Chapter 4, verse 23 reads: And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of

sickness and every infirmity among the people. And, again, in the same chapter, *verse 24* — And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they presented to him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments and such as were possessed by devils and lunatics and those that had the palsy: and he cured them.

Chapter 8 follows the Sermon on the Mount. When Our Lord came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. *Verses 2-4* relate: And behold a leper came and adored him, saying: Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith to him: See thou tell no man: but go, shew thyself to the priest and offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.

The well-remembered narrative of the centurion whose servant was sick follows in *verses 5-13*: And when he had entered into Capharnaum, there came to him a centurion, beseeching him. And saying: Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy and is grievously tormented. And Jesus saith to him: I will come and heal him. And the centurion making answer, said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: but only say the word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers: and I say to this, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and

to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. And Jesus hearing this, marvelled and said to them that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel. I say to you that many shall come from east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven: But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said to the centurion: Go, and as thou has believed so be it done to thee. And the servant was healed at the same hour.

Peter's family was spared the loss of a dear member. *Verses 14 and 15* relate simply — And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying and sick of a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her: and she arose and ministered to them.

Two passages follow that indicate His great mission to help the multitudes (*verses 16 and 17*): And when evening was come, they brought to him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word: and all that were sick he healed: that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet Isaias, saying: He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.

The boat in which Christ and the disciples had put out from shore would have been lost at sea had Our Lord not risen from sleep and miraculously stilled the tempest. On the other side of the water, He drove the devils out of

two men possessed and suffered them to go into the synagogue to preach in the sea.

Entering a boat, He passed over the water and came to the other city. *Chapter 9* relates the more notable miracles of health. *Verses 2-8* tell of faith and healing: And behold they brought him one sick of the palsy lying on a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son: thy sins are forgiven: they beheld some of the scribes said within themselves: He blasphemeth, Jesus seeing their thoughts, said: Why do you think evil in your hearts? Whether it is easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee: or to say, Arise, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then said he to the man sick of the palsy): Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house. He arose and went into his house. And the multitude seeing it, feared, and glorified God that gave such power to men.

Jesus, Himself, spoke to the Pharisees who asked the disciples why their Master ate with publicans and sinners. His own brief reply is found in *verses 12 and 13*: But Jesus hearing it, said: They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners.

The daughter of Jairus lay dead and he came to Jesus pleading for His help. Immediately Our Lord

rose up, but before He could be on the way, a woman of great faith and ill for many years touched His robe, and was cured. The poignant events are related in *verses 18-26*: As he was speaking these things unto them, behold a certain ruler came and adored him, saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come, lay thy hand upon her and she shall live. And Jesus rising up followed him, with his disciples. And behold a woman who was troubled with an issue of blood twelve years came behind him and touched the hem of his garment. For she said within herself: If I shall touch only his garment, I shall be healed.

The sightless, too, knew His compassion (*verses 27-31*): And as Jesus passed from thence, there followed him two blind men crying and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David. When he was come to the house, the blind men came to him. And Jesus saith to them: Do you believe that I can do this unto you? They say to him: Yea, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying: According to your faith, be it done unto you. And their eyes were opened. And Jesus strictly charged them, saying: See that no man know this. But they going out, spread his fame abroad in all that country.

He who could not speak was cured (*verses 32-36*): And when they were gone out, behold they brought him a dumb man, possessed with a devil. And after the devil was cast out the dumb man spoke. And the multitudes wondered, saying: Never was the like

seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said: By the prince of devils he casteth out devils. And Jesus went about all the cities, and towns, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity. Seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them: because they were distressed and lying like sheep that have no shepherd.

So great was Jesus' desire to do His Father's Will "having called his twelve disciples together, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of infirmities." In *verse 8 of chapter 10*, He directs: Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely have you received: freely give.

Commands were tempered with promise. *Verse 42* reads: And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.

In *chapter 11* Christ sends back John's disciples to relate the extent of His labors (*verse 5*): The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Healing on the Sabbath was considered unlawful. To ensnare Jesus, the priest confronted Him with the act of mercy He performed in their synagogue (*chapter 12, verses 10-15*): And behold there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked him

saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. But he said to them: What man shall there be among you that hath one sheep; and if the same fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not take hold on it and lift it up? How much better is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do a good deed on the sabbath days. Then he saith to the man: Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth, and it was restored to health even as the other. And the Pharisees going out made a consultation against him, how they might destroy him. But Jesus knowing it retired from thence. And many followed him; and he healed them all.

Still another poor creature was brought forward (*verse 22*): Then was offered to him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him, so that he spoke and saw.

When the multitudes expressed amazement at the things they saw and heard and asked: Is not this the son of David? The Pharisees would have none of it claiming that Jesus cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils (*verse 24*). They did this to incite the people against Him.

Herod the Tetrarch had apprehended John the Baptist: in prison he had been beheaded. His disciples came and took the body and buried it and came and told Jesus. When Jesus had heard, he retired from thence by a boat into a desert place apart: but the multitudes heard of it and followed him on foot out of the cities. Again (*chap-*

ter 14, verse 14), And he coming forth saw a great multitude and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

One's eye can see the events of the boat tossed on the waves. Our Lord walking on the *sea* and water—Peter, frightened in coming to Him to be saved, and asking Him to bid the disciples come to Him if it were not an apparition; then the wonder of Christ calling this frightened follower whose lack of faith would have caused him to perish in the sea, had not the Master stretched out His hand for safety. When they finally came upon the boat, the wind ceased. Having passed over the water, they came into the country of Genesar. *Verses 15 and 36* give further account of Christ's miracles. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent into all that country and brought to him all that were diseased. They besought him that they might touch but the hem of his garment. And as many as touched were made whole.

In *chapter 15*, St. Matthew gives account of Our Lord reproving the scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy. Then traveling to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a woman of Canaan came crying to Him, begging that He have mercy as her daughter was grievously troubled by a devil. He answered not a word and His disciples felt she should be sent away and not trouble them further. But the woman persisted, begging for help. He answered saying: It is not good to take the bread of the children and

to cast it to the dogs. But she said: Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus answering, said to her: O woman, great is thy faith. Be it done to thee as thou wilt. And her daughter was cured from that hour. (*verses 26-28*).

Journeying onward, Jesus and his disciples came to the sea of Galilee. Then going up into a mountain, he sat there. In *chapter 15, verses 30-31* continue: And there came to him great multitudes, having with them the dumb, the blind, the lame, the maimed and many others. And they cast them down at his feet. And he healed them: So that the multitudes marvelled, seeing the dumb speak, the lame walk, the blind see. And they glorified the God of Israel.

For would Jesus send them away hungry. *Verses 32-39* recount the awesome multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Calling together the disciples Our Lord said: I have compassion on the multitudes, because they continue with me now three days and have not what to eat. And I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And the disciples say unto him: Whence then should we have so many loaves in the desert as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus said to them: How many loaves have you? But they said: Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the vast crowd to sit down on the ground. And taking the seven loaves and the fishes and giving thanks, he brake and gave to his

disciples: and the disciples gave to the people. And they did all eat, and had their fill. And they took up seven baskets full, of what remained of the fragments. And they that did eat were four thousand men, besides children and women. And having dismissed the multitude, he went up into a boat and came into the coast of Magadan.

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. The time came when He took with him Peter and James and John and his brother and brought them to a high mountain. Here He was transfigured before them; the glory of it all they were to tell no man "Till the Son of man be risen from the dead." And coming down from the mountain they came to the multitude out of which crowd there came to him a man falling down on his knees before him, saying: Lord, have pity on my son, for he is a lunatic and suffereth much: for he falleth often into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said: O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked him. And the devil went out of him: and the child was cured from that hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus secretly and said: Why could not we cast him out? Jesus said to them: Because of your unbelief. For, amen I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Re-

move from hence hither, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you. But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting. (*chapter 16, verses 14-19.*)

Everywhere crowds were with Jesus. He departed from Galilee and came into the coasts of Judea, beyond Jordan. And great multitudes followed him: and he healed them there (*chapter 19, verses 1-2*).

St. Matthew relates the plea of the mother of the sons of Zebedee who had great hopes that her beloved offspring might have the right and left places in Christ's kingdom. Jesus' reply is well known to all. And when they, Our Lord and the disciples, went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And behold two blind men sitting by the wayside heard that Jesus passed by. And they cried out, saying: O Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on us. And the multitude rebuked them that they should hold their peace. But they cried out the more, saying: O Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on us. And Jesus stood and called them and said: What will ye that I do to you? And they say to him: Lord, that our eyes be opened. Jesus having compassion on them, touched their eyes. And immediately they saw and followed him (*chapter 20, verses 29-34*).

Shouts of "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest!" followed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. A very great multitude spread their

garments in the way and others cut boughs from the trees and strewed them in the way. And Jesus went into the temple and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple [the tables] and threw the tables of the changers and the chairs that sold doves. And he said to them: It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. Midst anger, tho. Our Lord had pity as St. Matthew tells us. "And there came to him the blind and the lame in the temple and he healed them" (*chapter 21, verse 14*).

In speaking of the Last Judgment the stricken are not forgotten. *Chapter 25, verses 37, 38, 39, 43, and 44*, tell us "The king say to them that shall be on his right hand: Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was sick, and you visited me . . . Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee sick . . . and come to thee? And the king answering shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." For those on the left hand of God, the reverse is true. These shall go into everlasting punishment.

Suffering supreme — the Passion and death of Jesus — are simply related in various verses of *chapter 27*. . . . And when morning was come, all the chief priests and ancients of the people took counsel against Jesus, that they might put

him to death. And they brought him bound and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. . . . Then he released to them Barabbas: and having scourged Jesus, delivered him unto them [the people] to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor taking Jesus into the hall, gathered together unto him the whole band. And stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak about him. And plating a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand. And bowing the knee before him, they mocked him, saying: Hail, King of the Jews. And spitting upon him, they took the reed and struck his head. And after they had mocked him, they took off the cloak from him and put on him his own garments and they led him away to crucify him. . . . they came to the place that is called Golgotha, which is the place of Calvary. And they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall. And when he had tasted, he would not drink. And after they had crucified him, they divided his garments, casting lots. . . . And they sat and watched him. And they put over his head his cause written: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. . . . Now from the sixth hour, there was darkness over the whole earth, until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? That is, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some that stood there and heard said: This man called Elias. And immediately one of them running took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and put

it on a reed and gave him to drink. And the others said: Let be. Let us see whether Elias will come to deliver him. And Jesus, again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

And He Who loved mankind, with particular compassion for

those ill in body or in spirit, gave His own life on a cross, suffering for those He came to save. His followers can only hope to give "signs" of His mercy through love and compassion when the opportunity is theirs to "go about doing good."

