3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Rolling Meadows - 1963

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 8: 2,5,6 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean..... And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

FAITH HEALING

We live in a day when the science of modern medicine has become enthroned and idolized and has all but pushed God right out of His heaven. Instead of recognizing the achievements of modern medicine as being a direct blessing and gift of God to us, they only too often become simply another stanza of the hymn, Glory to Man in the Highest! Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of Lights — we say it; but when it comes down to the practical application of this truth, the Lord God is perhaps the furthest thing from our minds. For example, when a serious illness or disaster strikes your home, what is the first thing you think about? Isn't it true of all of us that the very first thoughts that concern us are, Where can I find the closest ambulance? Who is the best doctor available to treat such a malady? Is there a miracle drug or an operation available to effect a cure? Where can I get the best care and attention? And where does God fit into all of this? When was the last time you bowed your knee to thank God for an aspirin tablet or a cough drop, for vaccinations and polio vaccines, for miracle drugs and X-rays, for operating skills and hospitals?

When the chips are down and we are desperate, then we turn to God in prayer. But even then, there is often so little confidence and expectancy about it all. We begin our petitions, but down deep in our souls there lurks a deep-seated skepticism. We approach God with the attitude: Well, it won't do any harm; it may not do any good, but we are desperate. We say that we believe that God is almighty, that with Him nothing is impossible, that He is our Helper in every need - but when it comes right down to it, we do not believe it very much. We say that we believe that the Great God is concerned and sympathetic toward us, that His eye is on the sparrow, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered - but here again we do not believe it very much. And it is little wonder that

with so little faith nothing happens. The Apostle James speaks right to the point when he says: But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

Irrespective of the fact that many so-called Faith Healers have exploited the public, bleeding desperate people of the life savings, making a multi-million dollar business out of their so-called ability to heal - there is still such a thing as faith healing. When all of the drugs and medicines and therapies have proved futile, God can still intervene! After doctors have shaken their heads in defeat, God can still heal! This must be our confidence! Leprosy was considered incurable. It continued to eat away at the flesh and organs until the body finally rotted away in death. But the leper in today's Gospel appealed his case to the Lord Jesus with full confidence in His power to help: Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. His prayer was simple and straight-forward. He prayed expecting an answer. And what do you know? There came the answer, I will, be thou clean! The centurion was a Gentile. But race and nationality made no difference to him. He believed in the ability of Christ to help where others had said the case was hopeless. His beloved servant was sick with the paralysis of palsy. And so he interceded: Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented! And over the miles went the Word of the Mighty Savior, and his servant was healed! Let us understand that there is nothing too big for the power of God, and nothing too small for His love. All too often we have not because we ask not!

The story is told of a lad who in the years of his childhood was puny and not at all well. So often was he face to face with death that he dreaded even to close his eyes in sleep. It was not that he was afraid of death; but he dreaded the repeated agony of it - a dying and never dead. For six long years he yearned and sighed and prayed. This little boy had a Christian mother who in her love for him was deeply concerned. She prayed as only a tortured mother heart can

pray; and in her prayer she promised the Lord that, if He would but restore her son to health, he in turn should be dedicated to the service of the Lord. It was the prayer of Hannah all over again. In time for the mother to keep her promise the boy was restored to health and has not been seriously ill since. Today he is in the ministry, dedicated to the Lord by his mother..... While this same lad was at the seminary, there came to him a letter from his mother informing him that his brother was desperately sick and that the doctor had given him but eight hours to live. That night he knelt at his bed, and over the miles traveled an effectual prayer. His brother sank, he hovered in the crisis -- and passed it. The fact is that he had passed the crisis even before the letter had reached his brother. But the brother who kneeled at his bed in prayer that night has always believed that God heard and answered his prayer, according to His promise: It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear..... Several years later this same young man stood by as his wife was wheeled into an operating room for a serious operation. His prayers, though incoherent and inarticulate to anyone but God, were fervent and expectant. His little son of a year and a half needed that mother. Back through the door of the operating room was wheeled the young mother, her heartbeat weak, her life hovering very near to eternity. Fervent prayers hung on to that slender thread. The mother rallied. She mended. She lived!

Only ~~last~~ week I talked with a friend of mine whose mother was given less than two weeks to live. This was over a year ago. Her entire body was afflicted with cancer. A staff of the best doctors in the country said there was nothing they could do. My friend flew in from California to Milwaukee to be at his mother's side during her last days. The entire family stormed the throne of heaven with their prayers and supplications, and to the amazement of the entire medical staff this mother is still alive today. What is it but the answer of God's great promise: Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. Certainly, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much!

We must be careful, however, that we do not dictate to God. To do so would be to question His wisdom. We may plead; we may promise; we may ever bargain. But never ought we to deliver an ultimatum. Both the leper and the centurion simply made their desires known and left the rest to God. We are always to pray according to God's Will. God knows us and what is best for us. We are reminded of St. Paul praying not once or twice but thee times for the removal of the thron that was tormenting him. That thorn was not removed. Years later, when he was glorying in his infirmities, he was still marveling at the answer which he he received from the Lord: My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. St. Paul appreciated the lesson which the Lord had taught him. He said, Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. It is a lesson that is not easy to learn - that pain, suffering, bereavement, sorrow, are part of God's way of bringing us closer to Him, and that it is not God's will that we should evade them entirely. We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.

Many think that when a severe and long illness come upon them, nothing could be worse. They are wrong. There is smmething worse - the loss of their soul, eternal suffering in hell, the result of sins unforgiven. Time after time Jesus gave the same admonition to those whom He had healed: Don't go talking about it too much. He did not want people to regard Him solely as the Healer of their bodies, but rather as the Savior of their souls. Of course, He is both, but He desires primarily to be the Savior of our souls; for unless our souls are healed and saved, the healing of our bodies will be to no avail.

Discouraging as it may sound, there is a direct relationship between sickness and sin. If it were not for sin, there would be no sickness. God created man in His own image, holy and perfect. He placed man into the Garden of Eden and gave him a moral test in connection with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. Man disobeyed God, and the process of death set in, for sin began to generate sicknesses and ills and pains and finally the death of the body. Our sicknesses and frail-

ties are to remind us of our sinfulness and of our dire need of a Savior. Never should we forget that the forgiveness of sins is more important than the healing of the body. We have here no continuing city. We are only strangers and sojourners on the earth. Sickness and death of the body are only matters of time. When that time comes for us, let us look forward with firm confidence to that day when our Savior shall work a miracle of restoration and change our vile bodies that they may be fashioned like unto His glorious body. The center of our Christianity is not whether we be well or whether we be sick or whether we be healed. The center of our Christianity is whether we have in our sinful and sad condition found Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Savior, who alone can heal us from the root of all diseases - sin. This is the center of our faith: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house! Then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Amen.