

**THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C**  
Ex 3:1-8,13-15; Ps 103:1-4,6-8,11; 1 Cor 10:1-6,10-12;  
Lk 13:1-9 (modified, Lk 13:6-13)

***THE HUNCHED OVER WOMAN***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun  
Saturday, March 6, 2010, 5:00 p.m. Mass

The **woman** in the gospel has a **severe back problem**.  
She was **hunched** over, completely incapable of standing straight up tall (Lk 13:11).

It's time for us to do **med check** on **back problems**.  
**Back trouble** is a very common ailment.

**Many** of us have had a **back problem** at one time or another.

There are lots of things that can go **wrong with the back**.  
I am no doctor or orthopedic surgeon, but here's my attempt at a list:  
simple backache, a back strain;  
back spasms;  
curvature of the spine (caries, scoliosis, or kyphosis),  
hunchback/humpback;  
chronic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis;  
spinal stenosis;  
degenerative disk disease, a herniated or ruptured disk;  
a broken back, one or more fractured vertebrae;  
osteoporosis.

In many of these situations, the person is **stooped, bent over**, due to:  
**fatigue**,  
a **loss of structural strength**,  
or a **loss of muscular strength**.  
Someone so afflicted is no longer able to maintain proper posture.

The **woman** in the gospel story was **stooped, bent over**,  
and she had been afflicted for a very long time.  
This woman was bent over for **18 years**.

Her **condition** was **chronic**.

This woman was dealing with a chronic, long-term, severe, crippling injury.  
Or, was she?

Luke goes on to say that this woman was:  
"**crippled by a spirit**" (Lk 13:11);  
"**Satan had her bound for eighteen years**" (Lk 13:16).

At first glance, it seems like the woman has a physical problem,  
but she had **something far worse**.

The parable has a surface, factual level,  
and a deeper, symbolic, spiritual level.

What really caused the woman to be bent over was  
sin, guilt, remorse, regret, embarrassment, shame.

The **weight of sin** is so great that it can cause a person to be **doubled-over**.

It works like this.

Let's say a person commits **one very serious sin**, and it was a long time ago.

The sin is like **a fifty pound weight** put on one's back.

The sinner has to keep lugging the weight around day after day,

and as time goes on, the weight of the sin causes back **fatigue**,

the back gets **strained**, then there is **damage**, and eventually the person gets **stooped**.

**One big sin** is **not the only way** to get 50 pounds on one's back.

There could be **one really bad sin** of 20 pounds,

and **three other pretty big sins**, 10 pounds each.

Three or four major sins over the years can put 50 pounds on the back,

the weight is **fatiguing, injuring, and ultimately crippling**.

Without Jesus, there is no way to unload it.

Jesus said, "***Come to me, all you who are heavy burdened***" (Mt 11:28).

Jesus has given us a way to unload the burden of our sin, guilt, and shame.

If the **sins** are **small**, we come to **Mass** and receive **Holy Communion**.

If the **sins** are **major**, serious, mortal,

Jesus has given us the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**.

We all have **sins** that **weigh us down**,

sins that make us **feel rotten** about ourselves,

sins that have **robbed us of the joy** of living.

We are all bound by evil in some way.

Jesus encountered such a person in the synagogue.

**Jesus** was **preaching** to a congregation of maybe 200 or 300,

but he is so **aware**, and **kind-hearted**, and **compassionate**,

that he **noticed** her in the congregation,

and he **interrupted** what he was doing.

Jesus called out to her,  
‘*Woman, you are set free of your infirmity!*’ (Lk 13:12).

“**Woman!**” Jesus addressed this guilt-laden lady with **kindness** and **respect**, (Lk 13:12).  
He called her in the same way he called his mother Mary (Jn 2:4; 19:26).

Then he said, “*You are set free of your infirmity!*” which means:

- \* “Your **sins** are **forgiven!**”
- \* “The **load** is **removed!**”
- \* “You are **freed** of your **guilt!**”
- \* “**Liberated** from your **shame!**”

To make sure that she got the message,  
and that it was delivered warmly, lovingly, and tenderly,  
he reached out and “*laid his hands on her*” (Lk 13:13a).

When Jesus was done laying his hands on the woman,  
“*at once she stood up straight and glorified God*” (Lk 13:13b).

One of the **most beautiful things** I get to see as a priest  
is the **joy** of people who have just **completed** their **confessions**.  
It is marvelous to behold the smile, the **relief**.  
Person after person tells me something like,  
“Father, it seems like the **weight of the world** was just **lifted** off my shoulders!”  
The person is instantly **tall!**  
**Forgiven**, it is as if they **danced away**.

When I’ve gone to the Sacrament of Reconciliation myself,  
and I’ve faced up to my wrongdoing,  
and the priest has absolved me,  
once Jesus has unloaded the weight of my sin,  
when I’m done, I can stand up tall, and joyfully dance away praising God.

This is **not to say** that **confessing** our sins is **easy**. It’s not!

One aspect of my ministry is to visit people who are elderly, homebound, shut ins.  
Shortly after I arrived here in Anoka I joined up with one of our Stephen ministers  
and began visiting a woman in her late seventies.  
She had cancer. She couldn’t get around very well.  
We went to her house every couple months, and we brought Holy Communion.  
A few times she asked to go to Confession, so we would chase everyone out of the living room.

As time went on, her condition worsened. She was moved to a nursing home.  
By then, she was eighty.  
She had late-stage, terminal, cancer,  
and one day her doctor told her very frankly, “You have about a week left.”

So she asked one of her family members to call me.  
We were good friends, and one of the last things she wanted to do was see me.  
I got the call, jumped in the car, entered the special hospice room,  
and her kids and grandkids were all gathered around the bed.  
We chatted for a while, and she said, “Fr. Mike, I want to go to confession one last time.”  
I had heard her confession a number of times,  
and I wondered aloud, “Are you sure? You’re in pretty good shape spiritually!”  
I thought, “It’s pretty hard to commit sins confined to a hospital bed.”  
Anyway, we chased everyone out of the room and she began.

She **blurted** out a **sin** she had committed when she was **sixteen years old**.  
Honestly, my friends, this woman had been **weighed down, bent over**, by this sin for **64 years**.  
When she was done, you should have seen **her face**.

She just **beamed**, she was **radiant** (Ex 34:35; Lk 9:29).  
Jesus had just laid his hands on her and said, “*Woman, you are set free of your infirmity.*”  
What a sight to behold,  
a woman with a broken body, a spirit healed;  
a woman whose legs could no longer walk, dancing anyway.  
I could have never imagined a woman so close to death being so joyful,

After confession was over I asked her, “**Why did you wait so long?**”  
We have celebrated this sacrament before.  
She replied, “**I was afraid.**”

You know something, my friends, **we’re all AFRAID**.

Then she gave me **her deathbed wish**, my final instructions:  
“Fr. Mike, in your ministry you’re going to talk to a lot of people.  
When I’m dead and gone, you tell them that **they don’t have to wait as long as I did.**”

**She** was **full** of the **Holy Spirit**  
and **God** was **speaking** through her to me,  
and through me to you.

She is telling us the exact same thing that **Jesus wants us to know**:  
there is **no need** for us to go through our lives as **hunch backs**, as **cripples**.  
Whether we have a big sin that took place three weeks ago, or last Christmas,  
or whether it has been years: 1 or 10 or 18, or 64;  
for goodness sake, we do **not need** to be **crushed** by the **weight of our sin**.

There is **no better time than** this Lent to **approach Jesus**,  
who died on the **Cross** for the **forgiveness** of our sins,  
to humbly **admit** to our wrong-doing and **ask** to be healed.  
**Jesus** certainly wants to **heal** our **physical problems**,  
but he is far **more concerned** about **healing** our **spiritual ailments**.  
**Jesus healed** the bent-over woman, and **Jesus will heal us**.