

JESUS'S MIRACULOUS HEALINGS IN MT 8:1-17 SIGNIFICANCE AND ROLE

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SUMMARY

Jesus's messianic identity is the central topic of the Gospel of Matthew, where the author presents the Messiah of Words and the Messiah of Actions in an original way. Namely, after chapters 5-7, in which Matthew writes about the Messiah of Words who restores the original meaning of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount, in chapters 8-9, the Evangelist presents not only Jesus's messianic identity, but also the model of his deep and fundamental messianism, which is evident in the power of miraculous healing, as well as the powerlessness of the servant, the authority of the call to follow in his footsteps, and the charity toward the poor. Therefore, we are addressing Jesus's miraculous healings, which demonstrate not only Jesus's messianic identity, but also the specific character of his »to be the Messiah«, i.e. the special significance and role of his actions that lead to salvation.

In Mt 8:1-17, the Evangelist presents three miraculous healings by Jesus: The healing of the leper, the healing of the Roman centurion's son, and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, which represent three vulnerable and marginalised groups: lepers, heathens, and women. Matthew ends the account of those three miraculous healings with a summary about Jesus's exorcisms and healings of many sick people, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah: »He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases«. In that specific quote, Matthew offers the key for the interpretation of Jesus's miraculous healings to the readers. Unlike the suffering servant from the book of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus does not accept the weaknesses of man onto himself; he instead removes them through his power as the saviour. By using the quote from the book of the prophet Isaiah 53:4 freely, Matthew does not attribute it to the suffering of Jesus, but instead to his miraculous healings. By replacing the noun *hamartias* »sins«, with the noun *hasteneias* – »weaknesses«, and the verb *ferô* »to bear«, with the verb *lambanô* »to take away«, Matthew recognises the Messiah in Jesus, who removes the weaknesses and diseases of men in his power as the saviour; a Messiah who is in solidarity with the weaknesses of men; a Messiah who heals and saves with his solidarity, by giving the weakest and the marginalised back the dignity of the sons of God. Therefore, Matthew recognises the messianic actions in Jesus's miraculous healings, which is realised in the suffering of Christ, which is the obedience to the intent of the God Saviour and solidarity with the rejected: lepers, heathens, and women.

Key words: Matthew - miraculous healing – Messiah – solidarity - salvation

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INTRODUCTION

Both in biblical and non-biblical literature, there are numerous reports on miracles, which speak about supernatural and extraordinary events that were in various ways linked to the acts of the divine in the history of the world and men. During the centuries, especially during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages, miracles were accepted without issue, as evidence of the existence of God and his care for the world. The development of natural sciences and the modern scientific-philosophical mentality has seriously challenged their historical accuracy and authenticity, considering them an expression of an ancient and naive worldview, which is unacceptable for a secularist culture (Borrell 2010).

In this paper, we want to investigate the significance and the role of Jesus's miraculous healings, which are raising many questions even today. Are Jesus's miracles historically reliable, and to what extent? What are the extraordinary features of Jesus's miraculous acts? What is the intent of the author? What is their meaning for the lives of people of faith today? As we seek answers to those and similar questions, in the first part of the paper we will analyse the biblical definition of a miracle, which is considerably different to the definition from Classical

Antiquity. In the second part, we will devote particular attention to Jesus's miracles from the New Testament, i.e. to a short presentation of their historical and extraordinary nature. The third part, which is the most important part of our research, contains the exegetic-theological analysis of Matthew's account of Jesus's miraculous healings (Mt 8:1-17), where the author reveals the identity of Jesus the Messiah and specifies his messianic nature.

BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF A MIRACLE

The term miracle is regularly attributed to an extraordinary event, one that cannot be described by logic and surpassing human cognitive abilities, which, as such, indicates the actions of a higher power. However, the Holy Scripture does not view miracles as merely supernatural phenomena. Quite the contrary, according to the biblical definition, all events, regular and extraordinary, are the fruit of the will by God the Creator of the World and the Master of History. In the Bible, a miracle is closely related to faith, and it is understood exactly in the context of faith in an invisible and transcendent God who acts as part of the history of the world and men, according to his will as the saviour and redeemer, according to which nothing is impossible (Borrell 2010).

From that perspective, we can conclude that a miracle is »a free intervention from God within creation and within a man, which expresses victory over evil and an invitation to participate in the Kingdom of God.« (Fisichella 2009). However, it is necessary to emphasize here that a miracle is not its own purpose in the Holy Scripture, nor is its purpose to reaffirm faith in men; it is instead a call to permanently and truthfully recognise the presence of God and his actions as the saviour in the history of the world and men. Within that meaning, a miracle is a sign that encourages a man of faith to contemplate and discover the face of the God of love and the mercy declared in the acts. Jesus's actions should also be observed in that light.

JESUS'S MIRACULOUS ACTIONS

The New Testament, particularly the Gospels, contain many accounts of Jesus's miraculous actions: exorcising evil spirits, healing the sick, miracles on the nature, resurrection of the dead. Unlike Jesus's contemporaries and the people of faith in previous times, for whom Jesus's miracles were a definite sign of the power and glory of the Son of God over men and the world, for the modern man they are becoming an ever-increasing challenge. One of the most common questions is certainly the question of their historical accuracy.

Historical accuracy of Jesus's miracles

In the second half of the last century, the critical reading of the Gospels has led to a systematic denial of the historical accuracy of Jesus's miracles. By demythologizing the New Testament, R. Bultmann brought Jesus's miraculous actions in question. In his scepticism of the historical reliability of the Gospels, Bultmann found that the accounts of Jesus's miracles have no grounding in history, considering them to be a part of the Early Church, which attributed wonders to Jesus in its depiction of Jesus the Messiah and the Son of God which were modelled after the miracle workers present in the Hellenistic environment (Dugandžić 1999). The same position, with more or less significant conviction, was represented by many New Testament experts; today there is a positive tendency in accepting the historical basis of Jesus's miracles (Manicardi 2002).

One of the strong arguments against the historic accuracy of Jesus's miracles is that the final edition of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's miracles is strongly conditioned on the faith of the first Christians in the resurrected Jesus (Borrell 2010). Namely, the accounts of Jesus's acts reflect the image of the Messiah and the Son of God, resurrected from the dead, with divine power acting within him. Even though some accounts can easily be understood as part of the post-resurrection faith of his disciples, it is unlikely that the Christians have formed such a rich tradition of Jesus's miracles

from nothing in such a short time. Oral tradition regarding Jesus's miracles »was not created by accident, and it is impossible to interpret without relying on the actual acts performed by Jesus« (Cifrak 2009). In the same manner, it is true that the Gospel accounts of miracles have been created by following the characteristic literary structure of contemporary Jewish and Hellenistic literature. However, this says nothing about their historical accuracy. Namely, it is perfectly logical that the events that happened in the Judaism of the first century were told following contemporary narrative conventions. According to some authors, the lack of any emphasis on Jesus's miracles in the Epistles of Paul, the oldest writings of the New Testament, is another argument against their historical accuracy. However, Paul's »silence« on Jesus's miracles should be interpreted in the context of the entire Paul's corpus, the primary goal of which is to reveal the resurrected Christ, not his historical life.

Taking all of this into account, the arguments in favour of the historical reliability of Jesus's miracles are much more important. According to A. Weiser, those include the following:

- The oldest layers of Gospel tradition speak about Jesus's healings and exorcisms (the source Q, which contained a collection of Jesus's speeches and the Gospel of Mark);
- Jesus's healings and exorcisms can also be found in independent accounts by Matthew and Luke, as well as the Gospel of John;
- The miracles were not only created as accounts of miracles; they also appear in summaries and are mentioned in Jesus's speeches and declarations. Apart from the Gospels, which are unanimous regarding the fact that Jesus performed miracles, and the texts from the Acts of the Apostles, which are considered the summary of the earliest apostolic kerygma, which emphasize Jesus's miraculous acts as something considered to be common knowledge among the Jews, for example, Acts 2:22 and 10:38 (Dugandžić 1999);
- Jewish literature speaks about Jesus's miraculous actions. In the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 43a) it says: »It has been said: On the eve of the Passover Jesus the Nazarene was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried: He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything on his behalf, let him come forward. But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover.«;
- Jesus's miracles and the centre of its teachings: the closeness of the Kingdom of God, are closely related. Considering that Jesus's teachings are historically indisputable, Jesus's acts, which are integral parts of his revelations, are also historically indisputable;

- Some healings and exorcisms are an integral part of Jesus' conflict with the leaders of the Jewish people (healing on the Sabbath for example). Considering that the conflict ended in Jesus's death, which is historically guaranteed even outside of the New Testament, that conflict has great historical value as a contributing cause of Jesus's death;
- Many accounts of miracles have characteristics that cannot be justified by a common schematic or interpreted as subsequent »fabrications«, and as such they indicate that they were rooted in the situation of Jesus's historical life (Wieser 1981).

We can then conclude that the tradition of Jesus's miracles had its source during Jesus's life. Jesus, his disciples, even his opponents, were convinced of his ability to perform miraculous healings and exorcisms (Borrell, 2010). However, in the historical context, it is difficult to reconstruct all the details of specific miraculous acts performed by Jesus (Lujčić, 2005). Even though the historical accuracy of Jesus's miracles is indisputable, we must differentiate between the accounts of the miracles as literature and the miracles as »facta«. Namely, an account of a miracle is not an actual »factum«. In other words, »an account may refer to a 'factum', be reminiscent of it, represent it, but it never enables a direct historical intervention on the 'factum' which is its foundation.« (Cifrak, 2009). Therefore, regarding the accounts of Jesus's miracles, we should disregard our history-focused concerns, because we are not faced with a historical account of a miracle, we are instead witnessing the living Word of God. We must not equate or mistake the truth of the Holy Scripture with historical truth. Unlike historical truth, which is based on certain documents, apodictic evidence, witnesses, etc., the role of biblical truth is more focused on formation than on information, testifying more than accurately presenting the facts. This of course does not mean that the Holy Scripture does not contain historical facts, but those facts are observed and interpreted in the context of faith. The specific question we should ask ourselves when faced with accounts of Jesus's miracles is not whether they are conveying accurate historical facts, but what is their meaning and what message they contain. In other words, instead of »What happened?«, it is more correct to ask: »What is the meaning and significance of the thing that happened?«.

Characteristics of Jesus's miracles

When talking about the biblical definition of a miracle, we pointed out that they are extraordinary events in which a man of faith recognises the actions of God the Saviour. Further in the text, we will address the basic theological characteristics of Jesus's miracles.

Jesus's miracles and the Kingdom of God

The central part of Jesus's gospel is the Kingdom of God. We should observe Jesus's miracles within the

context of that revelation. Jesus himself talks about the connection between miracles and exorcisms and the revelation of the Kingdom of God: »But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.« (Lk 11:20). Therefore, miracles are not only the signs of the presence of the Kingdom, they are also its significant characteristic. When Jesus heals the sick, exorcises evil spirits, and resurrects the dead, he is accomplishing the victory of God over the forces of evil. The salvation brought forth by Jesus in the name of God to persons of various social-religious status, especially people who were then worthless and excluded by their contemporaries: the blind, the possessed, the paralysed, the deaf... is real, specific, and universal (Borrell 2010). The salvation brought forth by Jesus therefore included the entire human being and extends to all creation. Therefore, we can conclude that the eschatological revelation of the Kingdom of God concerns the entire human being, here and now (Dugandžić 1999).

Jesus's miracles and revelation

Jesus's miracles are not only the sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God, they are also a revelation of Jesus's identity. Jesus revealed his identity as the Son of God through words and actions, according to God's revelation in the Old Testament. In that context, we can safely state that Jesus's miracles have a deep and powerful Christological dimension (Wieser 1981). Namely, all miracles, in one way or another, more or less extensively, raise the following question for persons talking to Jesus: »Who is he?«, inviting them to gradually reveal and understand his divine identity. In that context, the original goal of the miracle is the revelation of the person of Jesus and his mission as the saviour. As such, the miracles aim at encouraging men to contemplate a deeper understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ and leading them toward an increasingly closer attachment to his person.

Jesus's miracles and faith

Faith is also closely connected to the revelatory character of the miracles. Namely, the ultimate goal of the miracles is the faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. »They actually require a certain amount of faith, which will then turn into deeper understanding and acceptance of Jesus's person and his mission, with the help of the miracle.« (Dugandžić, 1999). Even though faith is often a condition for a miracle in the synoptic Gospels, in the Gospel of John, the only explicit condition for a miracle is faith: »Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.« (John 20:30-31). When talking about this, we must point out that they are not in any way attempting to extort or force a man to have a positive faith response and form an

attachment with the person and the mission of Jesus Christ. The miracles are a sign of Jesus's identity and his unique relationship with God the Father, for whom nothing is impossible and who guides the world and men toward the entirety of life and salvation. Therefore, in that world, miracles are an invitation to deepen one's faith in Jesus, who is announcing and realising the Kingdom of God here and now (Borrell, 2010).

MIRACULOUS HEALINGS OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

Out of the numerous accounts about Jesus's miracles in the Gospels, about twenty refer to Jesus's encounters with the sick, or the members of their household or friends who are asking him for help on behalf of the sick. Therefore, Jesus heals people from various illnesses: leprosy, possession, blindness, lameness, paralysis, deafness, muteness, fever, bleeding, water illness, epilepsy, kyphosis, and resurrects the dead (Runje, 2013). Considering that this is a wide and complex range of Gospel accounts, further in the text we will address Matthew's depiction of Jesus's healing of the leper, the son of the Roman centurion, and Peter's mother-in-law, which the author is concluding with a summary on many healings (Mt 8:1-17), providing us with a key for the interpretation of Jesus's healing activities within.

Jesus heals the leper (Mt 8:1-4)

The healing of the leper (Mt 8:1-4) is the first miracle in the Gospel of Matthew which was performed by Jesus toward an individual. The expression *kai idou* – »behold«, is used by the author to draw in the attention of the reader, and by leaving out detailed information, like biographical information, to emphasize that it is a leper. The Hebrew term *šāra'at* designates various, both treatable and untreatable, skin illnesses, of which leprosy was the one of the most serious and most dangerous, and being healed from leprosy was compared to being resurrected (cf. 2 Kgs 5:7). In the Old Testament, leprosy is a sign of punishment from God (cf. 2 Chr 26:16-23; Num 12:1-16). According to Lev 13 – 14, the lepers were in the category of the impure, and as such were excluded from social and religious life: They could not participate in cult celebrations, make sacrifices, enter the holy city and temple, and had to avoid contact with other persons (Grasso, 2014).

Despite this, the leper approaches Jesus, bows down to the ground and makes a request: »Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.« (Mt 8:2). The verb *proskyneō* – »to bow« and the appellation *kyrie* – »Lord«, which his disciples use to address Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, are an unmistakable sign of his faith in the divine power of Jesus's actions (Grasso, 2014).

Same as the request by the leper »if you are willing, you can make me clean«, in the context of Old Testament records where nothing is impossible for the will of God, is a plea to God's will as the saviour, which the leper recognises in Jesus's actions. Therefore, the expression »if you are willing« does not represent doubt by the leper regarding Jesus's actions as the saviour, but quite the opposite, his full committal to God's will in salvation and the freedom of his divine actions. It is interesting to notice that the cleaning that the leper is requesting does not refer to cleaning his sins. The leper is primarily asking Jesus to clean him by healing him and restoring his full social-religious status in his life, from which he was excluded because of his illness. According to Matthew's account, Jesus reached out his hands and touched the leper while saying: »I am willing, be clean!« (Mt 8:3). Unlike Mark (cf. 1:41.43), Matthew emphasizes that Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper, leaving out emotions and other details. Mark says that Jesus was moved by his request (cf. Mk 1:41) and that after he healed him, he told him off and sent him on his way (cf. Mk 1:43). How do we explain the fact that Jesus touched the leper? Could he not heal him by his Word alone?

When seeking answers to that and similar questions, some authors refer to events from the Book of Exodus, especially 7:5, where God speaks to Moses: »And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.« (Pesch, 1980). However, in our text, unlike the Book of Exodus, the reaching out with his hand is not the primary focus; the focus is instead on the fact that Jesus touched a leper. Others interpret Jesus's gesture in the context of standard behaviour of healers in that period, where they reached out their hands to emphasize the greatness and the magical character of their actions (Gnilka, 2000). Even though it is very likely that Jesus's contemporaries saw magical acts in his actions, especially his exorcisms, we must exclude the magical aspect of Jesus's actions, which were, as he said himself, actions by the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 12:28). Some church elders (Crisostomo, 2019) saw the sign of Jesus's supremacy over the Law when he touched the leper, which was forbidden (cf. Lev 13:45-46). This interpretation does not fit in Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus not only obeys the Law (cf. Mt 8:4b), but he does not intend revoking even the smallest letter or the least stroke of a pen (cf. Mt 5:17-18).

Laying of hands is a symbol of power and the transfer of strength. In that context, extending hands and touching a leper is primarily an expression of the power of God (Pesch, 1980). By touching the untouchable, i.e. the leper, Jesus heals a man and on the one hand reveals his will toward salvation expressed in the Word: »I am willing, be clean!« (Mt 8:3), and on the other hand, his solidarity with the outcasts and the marginalised, which are most clearly represented by

the leper. Indeed, further in the text, Jesus displays the same sentiment when dining with the tax collectors and sinners (cf. Mt 9:10-13).

By healing the leper, who was sick and isolated from God and from men, and as such was supposed to stay »outside the camp« (Lev 13:46) and who is the clearest example of the break between the original harmony of man in his relation to God, the world, and himself, Jesus is announcing himself as the Messiah of Israel, who is returning the *integritas primaria*, i.e. his physical, social, and religious completeness to man, which was given by God in the act of creation, and was lost through sin.

Jesus heals the son of the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5-13)

After healing the leper, Matthew writes about Jesus who, as he enters Capernaum, heals the son of a Roman centurion (Mt 8:5-13). The Greek term *pais* has a double meaning: »servant« and »son«. Considering that Matthew is using the term *doulos* (cf. Mt 10:24-25) for a servant, we believe that the text refers to a son, not a servant of a Roman centurion. *Ekatontarchos* is a Roman term (Lat. *centuria*) and it refers to a commander of a centuria, i.e. the basic Roman military unit which originally contained one hundred soldiers. Considering that there were no Roman military units in Galilee during Jesus's period, this was either a commander of a military mercenary unit of Herod Antipas, or Matthew described him as a Roman with the intent of saying he was a heathen (Grasso 2014). Regardless, it was a heathen man asking Jesus to heal his seriously ill son: »Lord, my son lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.« (Mt 8:6). Same as the leper, the Roman centurion also addressed Jesus by his honorific *Kyrie* – »Lord«. »I will go and heal him« (Mt 8:7) was Jesus's response, which most authors interpret as a positive response. However, along with Jeremias (1976), we believe that it is a questioning statement: »Should I go and heal him?« for three reasons. In the Gospel of Matthew, it is unusual for Jesus to »spontaneously« visit the homes of heathens. Namely, in Mt 15:24, Jesus directly says: »I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.« Jesus's rejection to visit the homes of heathens is in line with honouring the Law and tradition, which is characteristic for his position and his actions. Furthermore, the personal pronoun *egō* has a distinctive position which would be left out in the translation: »I will go and heal him!«. Finally, the centurion's response is easier to understand in the context of this being a question asked by Jesus.

As Jesus refuses, the Roman centurion does not lose hope, he explains his previous request by confessing his low position, and on the other hand his belief in the salvation of the Word: »Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say

the word, and my son will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, 'Come', and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it.« (Mt 8:7-9). For the Roman centurion, who is aware of the authority of a word from a man from personal experience, it is enough for Jesus to be present *just in a word*. As Jesus was impressed by his deep and pure faith, he healed his son by the power of salvation in his word: »Go, let it be done just as you believed it would!« (Mt 8:13).

Jesus's second miracle after the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), unlike the first one, does not refer to one of the Israelites, but a heathen who recognises the Messiah in Jesus Christ, and divine power in his actions. Thanks to the faith of his father, the son who was in his home, lying paralysed in his bed, was healed, and along with his father, a prototype of authentic faith, became a participant in Jesus's messianic community.

Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15)

After he healed the son of the Roman Centurion, Jesus enters the house of Simon Peter and performs the third miracle there. Unlike the first two, Jesus performed this miracle on his own accord. Namely, as he enters the house, Jesus saw Peter's mother-in-law lying with a fever and healed her on his own accord. Matthew leaves out the details contained in the parallel account by Mark 1:29-30: Jesus's exit from the synagogue and Jacob and John who entered Simon and Andrew's house with him, and who immediately informed him about the illness of Simon's mother-in-law, which directs the attention of the reader directly to Jesus (Harrington, 2005). Jesus's view in that case is not a view of choosing, like in the accounts of the first disciples (cf. Mt 4:18.21), instead it is a view of participation in pain and suffering of another.

It appears that Jesus only saw a woman *lying* with fever, and that he alone noticed her pain and suffering. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that Jesus also heals Peter's mother-in-law with this touch, like the leper, and that the focus is not on Jesus's words, same as with the healing of the leper, and especially the son of the Roman centurion, but instead on the gesture he uses to heal her: »He touched her hand and the fever left her.« (Mt 8:15). In the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus's *touch* is again a sign of the Messiah's solidarity with a suffering man and his actions as the saviour. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law has been described in a direct and very simple way, used by Matthew once again to emphasize the power of salvation of Jesus the Messiah: »She got up and began to wait on him.« (Mt 8:15). By waiting on Jesus, the woman not only represents healing, but also her personal position in relation to Jesus the Messiah. So, a woman became a model of an authentic response to Jesus's view and touch, i.e. the salvation of Jesus the Messiah.

Significance and role of Jesus's miraculous healing

Matthew ends the account of Jesus's miraculous healing with the words: »When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick – that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: *He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.*« (Mt 8:16-17), where we discover the role and the significance of Jesus' miraculous healings. Matthew uses the quote from Isaiah's fourth song about the servant of Jehovah: »Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.« (53:4). However, it is interesting to notice that the expressions »took our infirmities« and »bore our sicknesses« do not fit into the context of Mt 8 – 9, because in these, especially in Mt 8:1-17, unlike Iz 53:3-5: »He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.« Matthew deviates even from the *Septuagint*, i.e. the Greek translation of the Old Testament, by using the verb *lambanō* – »to take away« instead of the verb *ferō* – »to carry«, and instead of the noun *hamartias* – »sins« he uses the noun *hasteneias* – »weaknesses«. Matthew is not presenting a servant crushed under a burden of human weaknesses. Jesus us not taking sicknesses onto himself, quite the opposite, he is destroying them with his strength. It is a free use of Isaiah's quote, which Matthew is not attributing to Jesus's suffering, but to his miraculous healing.

In the context in which Matthew speaks about Jesus's power of healing, the verbs *lambanō* and *bastazō* do not have the meaning »to bear«, »to take onto oneself«, but »to take away«, »to carry away«. In that way, Matthew is recognising Jesus as the Messiah who is in solidarity with a suffering man and who uses his divine authority and power to release people from their weaknesses and sicknesses (Luz, 2010). Thanks to his solidarity with human sicknesses and weaknesses, Jesus heals and saves the destitute and the poor, by bringing and including them into the entirety of the social-religious life from which they were excluded, and fully returning the dignity of the sons of God to them. For Matthew in 8:17, as was accurately noted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, »it is absolutely clear that Christ is not helping in the power of his omnipotence, but thanks to his weakness.« (Luz, 2010).

Jesus's miraculous activities are the expression of his divine authority which serves man and his salvation.

Jesus's power of healing is the highest sign of his solidarity with those that are small and excluded from the entirety of the social-religious life in the eyes of the world: Lepers, heathens, and women, who are restored to their human dignity by Jesus and made a part of the new messianic people. Jesus's authority and power of healing can only be understood in the light of the cross. Indeed, at the beginning of Jesus's suffering, when he is formally entering Jerusalem like a Messiah, Matthew in 21:14 explicitly says: »The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.« It is necessary to mention that among the evangelists, only Matthew is writing about Jesus's healings in the Temple, at the beginning of his suffering. Jesus's messianic practice becomes solidarity with the smallest, the most vulnerable, and the neediest. Therefore, in Jesus's miraculous healings, Matthew sees the sign of messianic salvation which is realised in Jesus's suffering, the suffering in obedience to the salvation intent of the Father and in solidarity with the suffering man. This doubtlessly means that the fundamental meaning of Jesus's miraculous healings is the salvation of men, i.e. restoring the dignity of sons and daughters and full participation in the new messianic people, which is restored in their physical-spiritual health and peace.

CONCLUSION

Jesus's miraculous healings in Matthew's Gospel should be read in the context of God's revelation of love and mercy toward all men, especially toward those who are inflicted by all kinds of suffering and illnesses. By healing people from various illnesses and by exorcising evil spirits, Jesus is announcing his messianic identity, as well as the characteristics of his messianism, through the strength of his love as the saviour and his divine power, and he is establishing his Kingdom of Justice and Peace, by restoring the spiritual-physical integrity of man and introducing him to the entirety of life and communion with God, with himself, and with others, which is of course the fundamental meaning and role of his miraculous and healing actions.

In Jesus's miraculous healings, which should also be read in the light of faith, Matthew is announcing Jesus the Messiah with a meek and humble heart who is in solidarity with the suffering man and who is releasing him through his words and actions from all things that push him further from his humanity, from without or from within, and all those things that set him further apart from the original image of God according to which he was created. Through the power of love, Jesus is victorious over evil, and therefore, by embracing man for what he is, in his weakness, fleetingness, and sin, he is creating a new messianic community which prioritises the sick, the rejected, the disenfranchised, the persecuted, the marginalised... in a word, those that the Holy Scripture refers to as »God's poor«.

The modern man is invited to recognise Jesus the Messiah, God of life who redeems the world and men through the power of salvation in his love, in Jesus's miraculous healings, and to open his heart through faith in the salvation of his words to the Servant of Jehovah, who took upon himself all his weaknesses and all his pain, and who is still coming toward him to bring him, freed and reborn, into the entirety of communion with himself and the Father. But with equal strength, the authentic disciple of Christ is invited to see the »crucified« of today as the face of the Crucified, and through personal service to his smallest brothers and sisters, to witness the Kingdom of God present here and now, the Kingdom of the Messiah with a meek and humble heart who did not arrive to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (cf. Mt 20:28).

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