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The Gospel this morning begins with Jesus having just finished His great Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is The Sermon of the Beatitudes, where In it, he explains God's original intention for the Old Law and how to live it. And He is immediately invited to practice what He preaches. Interestingly, almost as a response to His sermon on the Mount, are the two statements of faith found in this morning's Gospel. The first statement is from a Jewish leper who says *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*, which if it were said today, *Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean*. Then there is the Gentile Centurion's statement, *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*. We know this phrase well, as we hear it six times during the Mass; right before the priest makes his Communion, and right before you all receive the Sacrament, though we replace the word *servant* with *soul*. Both statements of faith were rewarded with a miracle, but it was the faith of the Centurion that won not just a miracle but a compliment, *Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel*. We are called this morning to aspire to the great faith of the Gentile centurion, and in so doing, to learn what is expected of us in our participation at Mass.

A Jewish leper comes to Him and says, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*. According to the Law of Moses a leper was unclean, forced to beg and live in the wilderness. For ancient man, to touch a leper, even accidentally, would make one unclean. To invite a leper into one's home, would make the home and everything in it, unclean. Leprosy included any kind of skin disease thought to be contagious; even ring worm, and psoriasis. Remember this takes place in a day and age when there is no cure for anything considered to be leprosy. If it did not clear up on its own, and even if it did, if one could not afford the sacrifices required for the offering of thanksgiving that one was no longer a leper, then one was condemned to spend the rest of their lives as a leper, separated from friends and family. And so it is with desperation that this leper comes to Jesus. But there is something in how he says, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*, that gives the impression that he sees Jesus as just a wonder worker. He wishes to please Jesus, to placate Him, in order to be cured. The leper's faith was the faith of the man who thought, *I'm not quite sure, but maybe Jesus can do something for me*.

And yet, as is the habit with our Lord, this leper's uncertain faith is rewarded in a startling way, *Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed*. Jesus did not put on gloves, He did not take a step back and heal from a distance. He was not concerned about becoming unclean Himself. And in this case the healing was not gradual, the man was healed immediately. Immediately the man's life was changed, he was restored

to his friends and family, allowed to go back to the life that he had been forced to leave. Any doubt he may have had about Jesus' capabilities, any doubt that he would ever get to go home again was removed in a single moment. And before he can go all over the countryside pointing all the other lepers to Jesus, Jesus gives him a good dose of humility, *see thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded.*

He performs his second healing on the servant of a Centurion, a Roman soldier. The Centurion is a Gentile and an officer of the Empire that was occupying Israel. In the eyes of the Pharisees, this Centurion, completely ignorant of the God of Israel and the Jewish law, is just as unclean, if not more so than any leper. By the standards of the Pharisees, and by the standards of the Disciples, this Centurion, is the least likely to exhibit any kind of faith in Jesus. And yet, this Centurion, used to giving orders to his detachment of 100 roman soldiers, and expecting that those orders be obeyed on pain of death, approaches Jesus and says, *I have a servant at home who is suffering from paralysis.* Jesus says, *I will come and heal him,* a statement that raises the question of Jesus' loyalty to the Jewish Law. Visiting a Gentile's house would make him ritually unclean. But Jesus makes the point quite clearly all through the Gospels that it is more important to go ahead and heal even if it means breaking one of the finer points of the Law. God gave the Law to make things better, not to make things more difficult. In any event, the Centurion says, *Lord I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof, speak the word only and my servant shall be healed.* The centurion goes on to say that he is a man under authority. He operates within a chain of command, a military hierarchy. He has a hundred men who serve under him, and they do what he tells them to do. His unstated further point is that he believes that Jesus has the same kind of power over disease that he has over his men. All Jesus needs to do is say the word and the servant's paralysis will disappear, just as all he needs to do is say the word and his soldiers will obey. Jesus is amazed at the understanding this centurion displays. He marvels at him and says, *Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.* Then Jesus tells the centurion, *Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.* And the centurion's servant was healed at that very moment.

We are presented this morning with the desperate faith of a leper, in a day and age when it was thought that raising the dead was easier than cleansing a leper, and the unexpected and remarkable faith of the Centurion. What kind of faith is required of us Christians? And specifically, what kind of faith is required of us, we who come to this Altar weekly to receive Holy Communion? The gift Moses commanded has been transformed into our weekly participation in and reminder of Calvary. Weekly, we renew the promise of *ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice* to God. We hear again the words of the Lord

this morning, *this is my Body...this is my blood*, and again we are taught that our response should not just be, *Lord if thou wit, thou canst make me whole*, but *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed*. We should approach the Lord's Altar with the same kind of faith as the Gentile centurion, fully aware of our uncleanness and unworthiness, yet believing that all He has to do is say the word, and our faith will be transformed and we will be made whole. As Fr. Austin Farrer so aptly reminds us, *while it is the character of human faith to be content with whatever God is pleased to give, it is the character of divine love to give without measure. The worshipper says 'I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof'. But Christ says, as he said to Zacchaeus, 'Make haste, for today I must abide with thee.'* Amen.