

+

Last week we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus holds up to us a role model for being a good neighbor. Jesus ends the parable by saying the Samaritan took the mugged victim to an inn and paid a pretty penny for him to be taken care of, and promised to repay the innkeeper for whatever else was spent on the man's recovery. Of course the point of this well-known parable is to embody to us what it looks like to love our neighbors as ourselves, but it would be interesting to know what happens in the end to the man the Samaritan helped. The man was left beaten and bloodied in the middle of the road, and seen by the priest and scribe who passed him by to be as good as dead. To the Law of Moses he was also as unclean as any leper. We wonder, if he recovered, what his reaction was to the Good Samaritan. We find a glimpse of what the poor man's reaction to the Samaritan's extraordinary deed might have been in this morning's Gospel.

In this morning's Gospel we find that Jesus heals ten lepers who call out to Him saying, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*. And with one look, Jesus sets His healing power upon them as soon as He sees them. He tells them to go show themselves to the priests, and as they turn to go they are cleansed. The Gospel says, *and one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan*. Only one out of ten stopped to express gratitude to Jesus. Leprosy was an ancient disease that had no cure. These ten lepers had been separated from their families, forced to leave their jobs, put outside the city, and left for dead. Imagine their relief. Jesus looked at them and their healing began. Of course they would do whatever He said to do, anything to end their misery, their death sentence of leprosy.

The Gospel presents two reactions to the extraordinary healing these ten lepers experienced. The ten lepers are obedient to Jesus' command, and as they go to show themselves to the priests they are cleansed. One, the Samaritan in the group, as he sees he is cleansed is moved to extraordinary gratitude. He stops and falls down at the feet of Jesus; he glorifies God and worships Him. At this display of gratitude, Jesus says, *arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole*. It is remarkable that Jesus says, *thy faith hath made thee whole*. Because in the eyes of the Jews the Samaritans did not have the right kind of religion or the right kind of faith. The other nine lepers, who were not Samaritans, and therefore supposed to be of the right kind of religion and the right kind of faith, seem to be content with just being obedient. They miss out on being healed physically and spiritually of their

leprosy. This miracle shows us that obedience without gratitude, obedience without true worship is just to go through the motions. Jesus did not heal the lepers through a kind of riddle. Those nine lepers were cleansed physically. Showing themselves to the priests and offering the prescribed sacrifices in the Law of Moses were for the worship of God and to readmit them to society. The Law of Moses would not heal them spiritually. And no form of worship to God they offered through a sacrifice would be accepted if they were not grateful. The nine lepers were just going through the motions.

We each go through seasons where we experience spiritual dryness, when we go through the motions. Hopefully we still strive to be as obedient to Jesus as we can be. But if we look deeper at the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the healing of the ten lepers, we see that in our sinfulness we are spiritually in the same condition as the man who was beaten and bloodied and left for dead, we are spiritually leprous. After all, in Biblical days leprosy was assumed to be the physical manifestation of sin. Through the Sacraments of the Church, Jesus has given us the cure for our spiritual leprosy. But even these great treasures of the Church, the Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confession, are empty when received with ingratitude. We have been given the promise that our sins, the pasts that we are so ashamed of, can be forgiven and forgotten by God. How can we not fall down before the Lord's altar with hearts filled with gratitude? Yet still some are content to live by just going through the motions.

Obedience and thanksgiving are two of the most important Christian virtues, which spring from loving God with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, and with all of our minds. For most obedience and gratitude is a discipline rather than an outpouring of emotion. It is a discipline in that it is an attitude that we must learn. We must learn to give thanks to God for everything, for each little blessing, for every part of our lives, for our families, friends, talents, even for our trials and difficulties. But most importantly, we must remember to be grateful for the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by His death on the Cross has made a way for us to be right with God, to experience the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. It is from gratitude, from the true love and worship of God that springs the fruits of the spirit, the opposite of spiritual leprosy. The fruits of the Spirit, the marks of the true Christian: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, come not from the old law, but the new. And so let us not just go through the motions, but put renewed meaning into our prayers this morning, with grateful hearts praying, *We, thine*

*unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men..., but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*