

*Thy faith hath made thee whole*

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Have we ever prayed *Oh Lord, if you will only do this thing... if you would heal this disease... provide for this need... make a way through this difficult time... lighten this burden, then in exchange for answered prayer I will give myself totally to you... I will try my best to live a holy life... I will praise you forever... I will do this in thanksgiving for your honor.* When it so happens that our prayer request is answered, then we say, *God really answered my prayer, He really does hear us when we pray,* and distracted by the world around us and everything else going on we move on with our lives and give little thought to real thanksgiving. We fail to practice gratitude, the gratitude that we promised God for sending a cure to our prayer. When we do this, we are no better than those nine Jewish *lepers* who walked away with the faith that they would be healed but did not have the life of faith that would offer gratitude to Jesus who had performed their miracle. God shows us an example of gratitude this morning, and of humility in gratitude, through the Samaritan *leper* who stops and glorifies God, thanking and worshipping Jesus for the healing he will receive.

We are reminded again this morning of the Samaritans, those people on the margins of Jewish Biblical society. The Samaritans were neighbors to the Jews, living among the Jews but shunned by them. They were seen as less than, a heretical sect of strangers and foreigners. The Samaritans boasted of their own interpretation of the Law of Moses and God's Commandments and they had their own temple set up on an opposite mountain with their own priests. Their interpretation of the Scriptures, mixed with their insistence on worshipping the Lord God formally but alongside their own idols, was unacceptable to the Jews. The Samaritans were seen as disobedient and ungrateful to God and to His Law. The Jews prided themselves on professing a pure religion; they were righteous about keeping the Law and in worshipping God. How startling it must have been to the disciples to witness a Samaritan thank Jesus and glorify God while the other nine Jewish *lepers* shuffled off to show themselves to the priests.

Today's Gospel tells us that the ten *lepers* begged Jesus to heal them, and they were obedient to Jesus when He told them to go and show themselves to the priests. Only the priests could certify that a *leper* or any other person with any disease had been healed. It was after all, the priest that expelled the *leper* from among the congregation of Israel. In Bible times, as in many places today, leprosy had no cure and came with a sure and certain death sentence. The *leper* was

banned from society, from the synagogues and Temple, and was forced to live away from their families and friends. Leprosy was a lonely life, made worse by the knowledge that all ancient cultures judged it to be the result of notorious sin. Leprosy was thought to literally be sin in the flesh. If one was healed from leprosy, the sacrifice of a dove, the symbol of purity, was required to readmit the healed *leper* to society and to the life of the Temple and synagogue.

Thank God our religion no longer centers on ceremonial laws of physical cleanliness but a Gospel which grants spiritual cleanliness to our souls. God still can heal us physically and spiritually though, but often times our healing either physically or spiritually requires that we be grateful and obedient. St. Paul's warns us this morning of what can make us spiritually leprous: adultery, fornication, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, wrath, heresies, envying, murder, drunkenness, and the list goes on. And we ask the same question that another *leper*, Naaman, asked, *why must I obey God instead of what seems to me to be better?* We hear a part of the story of Naaman in the Old Testament lesson this morning. Naaman was a great Syrian general but also a *leper* who sought out a cure from Elisha the prophet who told him to go cleanse himself seven times in the Jordan River. Elisha was known as a holy prophet even in his lifetime, but Naaman was a successful and powerful Syrian general. Naaman was intelligent and wondered why the rivers in the country of Syria wouldn't be as equally healing as the Jordan River? Were the Lepers in today's Gospel wondering in the same way? Surely there were some like Naaman who were ready to quarrel with Jesus as Naaman had with Elisha, *let Jesus either cure or say that he will not, and not send us to the priests on a fool's errand.* But the *lepers* in the Gospel went along with the crowd, and the ten Lepers were obedient and began their journey to the priests. As for Naaman it took the faith of a little servant girl to persuade him to seek out the prophet Elisha, and it took the faith of his servant again to follow Elisha's prescription. Naaman was cleansed, and his skin as the Scriptures say, was as fresh and clean as a little child's. Naaman is healed and like the *lepers* from the Gospel, and he glorifies God. He even offers to reward Elisha, but Elisha is content to see God glorified and receives no reward but to make Naaman vow that he will only worship God Almighty.

Elisha would have encouraged Naaman to faith without gratitude if he had accepted a reward and let Naaman go on his merry way. But Elisha calls Naaman to a lifetime of gratitude by encouraging his vow to worship only the Lord God and to sacrifice or worship to no other idols or false gods. Likewise, today's Samaritan *leper* prays with the other nine, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*, and as he goes on his way, he realizes that the Lord's word is true, that

as he walks towards the priests, with every step he is being healed. The other nine lepers were just happy to be healed in body. They were Jews and so they immediately obey the command to go and get their healing certified by the priests. The Samaritan obeys the Lord, but he is grateful for his healing, of the process which had already begun, and he confirms his healing through bowing down and glorifying God in worship and thanksgiving to Jesus. This Samaritan, because of his gratefulness, receives complete healing, he is healed in body and in soul, and his leprosy and sin are healed. What of the other nine? They do not have their miracle revoked, because the Lord is merciful. He does not punish them for their ingratitude, but their healing is left only skin deep.

We learn from this miracle that if we are to seek healing from Jesus Christ, then we must confess Him as Lord. We mortals, who struggle to guard against the spiritual leprosy of sin must lift up our voices and say, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*. For, if we are to expect help from Jesus we must confess Him as our Lord and Master and be at His command. If we confess Him as our Master then we confess Him as our Savior, and not otherwise. To confess Jesus as Lord implies that we will be obedient to His will and commandments. We must be obedient and grateful of God's will, which may very well mean that we are not healed in the way we thought we should, or that our prayer seems to go unanswered. It means that we may have more in common with Naaman and those other lepers than we thought. We persist in asking *why can't God just make it happen? Aren't there better rivers here than over there? After all we are God's people, isn't it His duty to take care of us and give us everything we need?* Regardless of the outcome of our prayer, God is working out our healing in body and soul.

And so today we pray for an increase in faith, hope and charity, for faith and hope in God's will for us, for charity that we will be obedient and grateful to obtain the promises of God, and that God will help us to love what He commands of us. Let us hold up before us this grateful Samaritan and Naaman's young servant, whose childlike faith encouraged him to seek out Elisha and to be obedient to God's instructions. We must remember to encourage each other to prayer, especially if our prayers have been answered. For those that have received mercy from God should publish it to others that they may praise God too and may be encouraged by their experiences to trust in him. We ought to give thanks for the favors Christ bestows upon us, and particularly for recoveries from sickness; and we should immediately thank God for them. We must be very humble in our thanksgivings, as well as in our prayers. For then the Lord will pronounce over us, *thy faith hath made thee whole*.