

Devotion on the Miracles of Christ (Ten Lepers) - 15 February 2014, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, **Go shew yourselves unto the priests.** And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, **Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?** 18 **There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.** 19 **And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.** (Luke 17:11-19)

In national diplomacy, we often refer to the “Full Faith and Credit of the U.S. Government.” The implication is that all the American government has and believes is behind, and supports, a certain policy. Today’s Gospel theme is like unto that phrase, but with an added dimension – gratitude. We may have full faith, but that faith must be backed up with gratitude for blessings received.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to be crucified for us – for the people at Jerusalem, for the very Romans who nailed Him to the cross, for the Galileans, for the Samaritans, and for all nations, tribes and tongues who believe on Him. It simply “***came to pass***” that he went through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. It was not otherwise essential for Jesus to pass through Samaria, but He did for a purpose – the same purpose decreed from eternity past; and that purpose involved ten lepers whom He knew He would meet on His way. Jesus is always going through the midst of nations for a specific purpose. Somewhere along the extended route He always took, perhaps He met YOU along the weary road, seemingly by happenstance! But it was not happenstance, for nothing of God happens by happenstance. You were dying of a filthy and odorous, blood-borne disease called sin, but He healed you and restored you, if you called out to Him as did these poor lepers. How like sin is the disease of leprosy. It was deadly, it was insidious, it rotted away the very being of a person, it could not be covered or escaped, and it relentlessly ate away at the limbs and vital organs of the body just as sin does the soul. THERE WAS NO KNOWN CURE! What was needed for a person with leprosy was simply a miracle!

Perhaps we do not understand that our salvation – our healing from our deadly

disease of sin – came by the same miraculous Word that healed the lepers on the way to Jerusalem. The kind of love that Jesus offers is not a sentimental or tentative love – it is an all-consuming, miraculous kind of love. All true love descends from God. And all that God touches is a miracle! How could One of perfect righteousness – sinless in every respect, Holy and unable to even look upon sin - take all of our filthy sins, and the sins of the world, upon Himself in the shame, humiliation, and torture of the cross? Was it not a miracle? If a bitter enemy comes near and you were to insult him with your greatest offense, or even strike him or his only son, would it not be a miracle is he gave his life in preserving your own?

When you were first aware of your disease of sin, did you try to conceal the rotting tissue – the ominous and repulsive odor with perfumes? Did you cover, as long as possible, the signs of leprosy (sin) with your best apparel as did Naaman, the Assyrian Captain? But after a bit, it becomes impossible to cover such a disease that slowly advances toward certain and eternal death. Sin separates the sinner from God, and from his loved ones, just as leprosy separates the leper from his family and friends. You will soon find that, like Naaman, you need a miracle, and that miracle can only be had in Christ.

Jesus wittingly went to Jacob's Well that noonday hour for a specific purpose – to meet a woman of ill repute there who sought physical water, but left with the Water of Life. He then used that woman to draw many more Samaritans to Himself. It was no accident of chance, but an event of purpose and known action. So our narrative from the Gospel text opens with Jesus passing through Samaria and Galilee on His final earthly visit to Jerusalem. *11 "And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee."* The Samaritans were cast-offs from the Judean religion, but Christ NEVER forgets the cast-offs. In fact, He makes special provision for them in meeting them WHERE THEY ARE TO BE FOUND, just as He came to you where you could be found. It may have been in a busy office, a train, a lonely midnight street, or even a barroom, but He always comes to where you are with His gentle prodding's of the Holy Ghost. You looked from the place where you stood and saw Him coming to you!

You will well know, if you are a person of faith, that sin separates us from God. Adam and Eve hid themselves in the Garden after sinning against their loving Creator. Cain also hid from the presence of God, or tried to do. Sin makes a great abyss between us and God just as broad and impassable as that which existed between the Rich Man and Lazarus. Only God can breach that abyss, and He must come to us in doing so. *12 "And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off."* Jesus never separated Himself from lepers. In fact, He is the only One I read about who actually dared touch a filthy leper in Scripture. *And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.* (Matt 8:2-3) God does not make a separation between us and Himself – WE are the ones who make the separation through our sins or leprosy. The lepers were not allowed to approach near people. If they met on the road, they were required to shout "Unclean, unclean!" as a warning for others to stay clear of them. So we see these lepers were afar off from Christ when they saw Him coming.

These ten lepers were obviously of mixed tribes for the Gospel specifically points out that one of them was a Samaritan. It may be logically assumed that some, at least, were Jews or Phoenicians. But sin unites across racial and national boundaries. Being

outcast from God, the sinners are united in their darkness. The sinners travel together while their disease separates them from God and His Church. Have you known the time in your past when you slithered beneath the rocks at the rising of the Sun to shield your eyes from the great Light? Did you not find fellow creatures there who loved the darkness more than the Light?

When we have wronged our best friend, how we avoid looking that friend squarely in the eyes! Sin separates!

**13 "And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."**

When sin has choked out your last breath and paralyzed your heart, you then know that your condition is hopeless. But then you look up and see the Giver of Life and the Healer of the nations on the road coming your way. What will you do? Will you avail yourself of the Healing Balm, or will you say, "I don't need it! I shall die in my sin?" There are three circumstances common to these ten lepers: 1) they ALL have leprosy and are dying of the disease; 2) they are together in their demise; and 3) they all have faith to call upon Jesus for healing. Their faith was not all equal, for nine only sought healing from the deadly physical disease that afflicted them, but one had faith sufficient to plead for the spiritual healing of Christ as well. Do you pray for healing of the body to the neglect of the soul? We are in a constant war against sin and evil. Our full faculties must be mobilized to watch out for the intrigues of the enemy, but also for the arrival of the Captain of our souls along the weary road to Jerusalem!

These ten lepers pled for mercy! If they could receive mercy from the Lord of Life, that would certainly suffice for their healing of leprosy. It is interesting to note Jesus' response: "**14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.**" They sought healing, and they believed that they would have it if they followed the surprising Word of Jesus. Jesus does not always respond in the same way. He could have simply healed these lepers on the spot as He had done others, but He had a point to make to His disciples, so He told the lepers to show themselves to the priests so that they might be declared clean and able to return to their families and friends. Have you, too, received a counsel of God that simply does not seem to fit your prayer? Has Christ told you to obey some counsel that did not, at the time, make sense? If so, what did you do? Did you follow His Word, or disobey?

Sometimes, in order to answer our prayers, Christ sends us on an errand that may not make sense to us. These poor lepers all OBEYED though they were not immediately healed. Is this not an amazing miracle in itself, I mean, that they did obey without question? What was the result? "**And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.**" The faith they demonstrated in both calling out to Christ, and promptly obeying His command, was an elemental faith that would result in the healing of one deadly disease, but not another more serious affliction (sin) for nine of them. As they went to see the priest, they realized that they had been healed. By now, they have made some distance from the One who healed them – it is probable that they were not 'out of sight' of Jesus. How do they respond? Perhaps they reckoned, "Well, we have that for which we came. Let us not trouble the Master by returning and giving thanks. He will know that we were healed?" Their immediate joy perhaps overwhelmed their sense of gratitude so that their gratitude was diminished by their senseless joy. Now they could return to their families. Now life would again be normal for these suffering men. But what about the One who gave them such a wonderful gift? Not worth their time to return to express their humble gratitude? Do not children often grow up to resent the very parents who made their lives possible?

When we pray to God, we must accept whatever answer is forthcoming even if we do not understand it at the moment. We must be thankful enough to express that gratitude on bended knee. But do we? Do you remember the great national appeal to God through prayer that happened all across America on the Eve of the Desert Storm Operation in January Of 1991? Churches and communities turned out for prayer vigil unlike anything since the Second World War. Our troops were heralded by well-wishers from the bridge overpasses as their convoys wheeled toward the points of disembarkation. It was a most encouraging and inspiring moment. There seemed to be hope for the moral decline of America at last. It was expected that the allied Forces might sustain a casualty rate as high as 60,000 in the first four hours of battle. God moved in the Heavens and His Angels of War soared above the heads of our battle elements in a manner not unlike that wonderful Pillar of fire that followed the Children of Israel out of Egypt. The casualties were quite minimal – sixteen fatalities and only a few injured. What was the result? Did the nation's churches again turn out in droves to return thanks and gratitude to the God of Battles who sustained our forces in the field? No, not appreciably. Instead, we were treated to debriefings and continual news flashes of our good General, "Stormin' Norman" Schwarzkoff, outlining how our brilliant technology and strategic planning had "won the day." God was, sadly, not mentioned.

God always has His one faithful soul in every mixture of ingrates. He had Abel who stood against the growing evil of the first generation of men. He had His Samuel who stood against all of Israel in their desire for a king to rule over them – other than the King of Heaven. He has had his Ruth's and Naomi's, His Paul's and His Stephen's – and He now has one out of ten healed lepers whose heart, more than his body, has been touched and healed, all the way through, by Christ. *"15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God."* All quickly went on their way to the priest at Christ commands. All were healed on the way; however, one, just as promptly as recognizing his healing, immediately turned back to the Source of his healing to glorify God. This is wise for two reasons: 1) it is always wise to be grateful for gifts received. A heart of gratitude is reward unto itself for health and joy; and, 2) when we fail to express gratitude for blessings granted either by God, or by friends, we shut off the flowing Fountain of Living Waters for future blessings. This one leper was not timid to glorify God with a "loud voice." He cared not who heard his glorifying. He, in fact, wanted every living creature in earshot to hear his praises of the One who had healed his leprosy, and his heart.

How uncharacteristic, in the eyes of the disciples, for this particular leper to be the only one to return thanks for he was a disgusting Samaritan! What were you before you came to Christ, friend? Were you better than this leper? Were you better than the other nine? How the modern church disdains a poor and itinerant sinner who wonders into their marbled palaces in disarray!

*"16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan."* He did better than all the other nine who were comprised of at least some of the better race – Jews. Do you not yet see that God cares not for color of skin, or national origins? He looks upon the heart only! This humble Samaritan knew how Jewish society regarded lepers, but he also knew how it perceived Samaritans as well. He was BOTH, yet this loving Savior took pity upon him despite his shortcomings and condition. He was not ashamed to fall at the feet of such a beneficent Savior. Are you ashamed after all He has done for you?

Jesus' following question was rhetorical: *"17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?"* Of course, He knew where the others

were – they were still hurrying to the priest to settle pressing personal consideration, not having time to return and thank their Benefactor. Even when we depart from Him to cherish our sins, He yet knows where we are. Jesus is asking this question to draw a vivid impression in the minds of His disciples. When we read the Word of God, and hear it preached from the pulpit, we may not at first understand fully, but the Holy Ghost will, in time, bring all such things to our recollection and understanding. These same disciples, though they could not grasp the full gravity of Jesus' inquiry at the moment, later proved their apostolic understanding in the lives that they lived, and died, for Christ!

This **stranger**? This stranger was once Jerry Ogles! We were all strangers to God before we came to Him in faith and gratitude. *"18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."* When we seek the favors of God, we do not go half way, but ALL the way. We must not simply "eat the fish and leave the bone." We feed on every Word that comes from the mouth of God whether every Word is personally pleasing or not. Our modern society has decided that it can edit out certain egregious sins from the Holy Bible – sins such as the murder of innocent babies in their mother's womb, or abominable sins such as homosexuality giving, it rather, a place of dignity among society and even the church. How apostate can we become! But only 'this stranger' returned out of ten to give thanks. They were all in the same congregation. All sought the same Lord. All heard His healing Words. All obeyed His command (to a certain point). But after that point of healing, nine failed of gratitude and grace expected of a Christian. Is not the same thing happening in congregations all across America today? Have we not labeled that which is good, 'bad;' and that which is bad, 'good?' Have we not sat and listened to the sermon with closed minds and ears – or, else, has the minister himself not compromised away the Word and will of our Holy Father to the detriment of millions of souls? Are we so much in a hurry to get back to the things of the world after our prayers, that we neglect gratitude for the mercies of God?

It was faith in Jesus that brought the leper to the point afar off to call upon Him to have mercy. It was a stronger faith that compelled him to return to the Source of his blessing of answered prayer. And it was faith that drew him to Christ. Though it was Christ who healed and forgave, it was faith that was the agency whereby he was drawn in the first place. His faith was a surpassing faith that went beyond simple belief, but went on to a loving gratitude that welded his soul to that of Christ. *"19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."* Only when we come to Christ on bended knee can we 'arise' from our paltry predicaments and face a new life of salvation and righteousness. Christ does not heal halfway, but All the way if our faith enforces gratitude.

Have you thanked God today for your next breath, your next heartbeat, and all of the more obvious ways He has blessed and healed you?

If not, what are your intentions?