

Homily on The Healing of the 10 Lepers

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In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Today we commemorate the Healing by Christ of the Ten Lepers. This healing is a miracle and like most of the miracles in the Gospel it has a dual meaning.

Its first meaning is an inner meaning, and deals with what true faith really is.

The other meaning is an outer meaning dealing with the unfaithfulness and ungratefulness of the lepers. This meaning is very clear: it tells us that we should give thanks to God in all things, particularly when we are given great things.

But, as we read in today's Gospel, only one man gave thanks to God for this great miracle given to him, the miracle of healing from leprosy.

Leprosy was and still is a terrible affliction. It was only in the 1940s that an efficient cure for leprosy was developed.

Even to this day hundreds of thousands of people worldwide are still suffering from this disease and even in the UK around 12 cases a year are diagnosed.

What is now a curable and easily medicated disease, meant a life of exile, isolation and rejection in the days of Christ. We can only imagine what a horrible life, lepers had. There is still a saying that most people will probably have heard: to be treated like a leper. This saying is normally used when someone has been or is being very badly treated.

To the Jews it represented uncleanness. Lepers were shunned from the community and forced to live in segregated communities away from other people. They were not allowed to enter the temple, and they were not allowed to go near to or touch Jews. They were truly exiles amongst their own people.

In the context of our Gospel reading, leprosy is used as a metaphor for our sins. And, as we heard, unless we raise our voices to ask God for mercy, our sins will not be forgiven.

Those lepers knew that they had to be very insistent to have their voices heard and for God to hear and forgive them. Many of us do not understand how much we need to call out to God, and ask forgiveness for our sins, just like those lepers did.

Our Lord Jesus Christ followed Jewish Law to the letter by telling the lepers to go to the priests so that He would not be judged before His time.

He also shows us that obedience can make a man clean. It is because of their obedience that the lepers were cleansed. Even the ones who were not thankful were cleansed, because they had been obedient.

Following their healing, only one of the ten lepers turned back and loudly glorified God. He had been obedient. He was told to go to the priests and so was cleansed on the way.

He knew that the Great High Priest had healed him, so he returned to the Great High Priest, Christ our God, and worshipped Him.

He understood. He saw what a great miracle had been worked here, and he knew that only God could have done such a thing.

Why? Because he had faith! Faith is how we live, how we act. Faith is when God enlightens us and fills us.

Faith is not only an individual or theoretical belief in the dogmatic truths of Christianity, but an all-embracing relationship, an attitude of love and total trust in God.

As such it involves a transformation of man's entire life. Faith is a gift from God, the means whereby we are taken up into the whole theanthropic (God-man) activity of God in Christ, and of man in Christ, through which man attains salvation.

Faith is not just believing in something, it is being so filled with God, that we act like God; in mercy, in love, in compassion. This means to recognise God, worship Him as who He is. That is faith.

And this one leper, he was the only one who had faith. He saw the God-man, he was touched by Him and reacted to Him!

Today's Gospel reading shows us that we should give thanks to God, just like the one leper. All that we see around us was created for man – both the angelic world, the visible world, and the invisible world – that he might live, giving thanks to God, and that his entire life might become the same sort of thanksgiving, the same sort of divine service, as the divine service at which we are now present.

That is why it is called the Eucharist, which translated from the Greek means "Thanksgiving." Our life, through the liturgical services, communion with God, and partaking of Christ's Holy Mysteries, thereby becomes a giving of oneself to God and of thanksgiving to Him.

But in the main just like the nine other healed lepers, we do not give thanks. We fail to see that the Church gives us so many wonderful gifts, so many incalculable riches, and many, many times, we do not value them as we should.

We fail to understand what great things we have been given. We probably do understand them on an intellectual level, but that does not necessarily mean that we act with fervent faith because of them. The gifts we have been given are so tremendous that we should be spurned on to make us live in Christ.

Living in Christ is not only about knowing the things that God revealed to us in the books and traditions of the Church. Although these are all God inspired, we need to make them so that they define who we are, not just what we know.

We should learn to master God's mercy so that we can react in ways that are naturally good and holy. This came natural to the one leper. It had taken him much effort, because he had been sick for a long time and had to endure a lot of hardship because of his leprosy. We must do the same. Why? Because of our sins.

Our healing and growth should start just as it did for the one leper who returned. We must recognise our lowliness, our utter inability to save ourselves, our need for more healing.

We must abandon ourselves to Christ our God. We must worship and thank God for His gracious work in our lives. We must humble ourselves before Him in thanksgiving and acknowledge that He is the source of our life, healing and salvation.

This Gospel reading truly teaches us what thankfulness to God is, what service to God is, what our participation in the Eucharist is, because it is precisely here where that deep thankfulness is expressed.

That deep expression of thankfulness when we give ourselves to Him, thereby taking Him into ourselves and living with Him.

Then our life will be like that of the angels, who live exclusively in thanksgiving to God, exclusively in glorification, who cannot live in any other way, since Divine beauty is so imprinted upon the spiritual world that there could be no other angelic life.

Therefore, the man who has imprinted this glory of God onto himself can live in no other way than to offer constant thanksgiving to God, to constantly give himself to God to the end.

Amen