



12TH SUNDAY OF LUKE

January 15

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 17:12-19

[The Ten Cleansed Lepers]

At that time, as Jesus entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus's feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus: "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him: "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

THE SERMON

Jesus Christ came to seek and save those who were lost. He came to heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick, and recognizing our own need of Him is the first step towards healing. We are born into a fallen human condition, and it takes faith to understand this and ask the Lord for help. When we do, our faith, through Christ, makes us well.

On his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus enters a village, and ten lepers come to Him. No doubt, they had heard of the Lord's fame, who, for about three years, was ministering with the Holy Spirit and with power, going about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. Leprosy, known today as Hansen's

Disease, can be cured with early diagnosis and proper treatment and is not as contagious as once believed. In ancient times, however, leprosy was thought to be highly contagious and could not be cured.

In the ancient world, leprosy brought great physical suffering, banishment, and isolation from society. Lepers were removed from any contact with family or friends. In the Jewish context, they were not permitted to enter the Temple nor participate in Israel's religious or liturgical life. The lepers were at the outskirts of the village, but when they heard that Christ had come, they entered the town and, standing at a distance, addressed Him as "Master" and asked for His mercy.

The lepers come to Jesus with a cry from their hearts as they "lifted up their voices." It was not a quiet, tentative request but an urgent cry from those dying and suffering on society's fringes, alone and miserable. When Jesus saw them, He immediately told them: "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

This might have been a very puzzling command to the lepers. In the Old Testament, the Mosaic Law required that people with leprosy be isolated. Still, if they were ever to be cured by a miracle, they were to go back to the priests for restoration (see, for example, Leviticus 14:3-31).

No doubt, the lepers knew of the Law that regulated their condition, but now Jesus sends them to the priests without curing them first – at least as far as they could understand. Notice that Jesus did not touch them, as He often did in other healings. This is because the Lord heals us in *His* way and in *His* own time.

Here is where faith and obedience come into play. The lepers obey the word of Jesus without questioning why they were asked to show themselves to the priests while they were still apparently diseased. They did not question the Lord nor oppose His command but went as He told them. We read that as they went, they were cleansed.

Notice that their healing came about while they were, first, *exercising their faith* in Him and second, *obeying Him without question*. They believed and obeyed Him as they departed and made their way to Jerusalem, where the priests resided. This was a display of *faith and works*. They had faith in Christ and His words and showed their works through obedience. The virtue of obedience (*υπάκοη* in Greek) is essential in our relationship with God and is often mentioned in the writings of the Church Fathers. Saint John of the Ladder says, "Obedience is ... a voluntary death ... the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility." Voluntary obedience, in other words, is the means through which we set aside our personal cares and self-interest and arise as true sons and daughters of God.

Ten lepers were healed, but only one, a Samaritan, thanked the Lord. He turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and fell to his knees at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. To the Samaritan, Jesus was no longer just a "Master," but his "Lord" – not simply the One Who commands, but his Benefactor.

This leper was a Samaritan, and Samaritans were considered non-canonical Jews and unclean because they did not follow Jewish Law in the same way that the rest of the Jewish people did. They were deemed “heretics,” and foreigners. Jesus uses the expression here ironically, as a criticism of the Jewish attitude of the time, and says, “Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

The word the Lord uses is translated as “foreigner” (*αλλογενής* in Greek) and is the equivalent of the modern Greek word “xenos” (*ξένος*), which is a stranger or outsider. The Lord emphasized that prejudice was unhelpful and misleading because it was precisely the “foreigner” who came back to thank Jesus.

The Samaritan’s thanksgiving was an act of love – and Christ honors the gratitude of the Samaritan while remarking on the ungratefulness of the others. The Lord does this to show us that faith alone will not save us because true faith includes obedience and thankfulness. That is why it is essential to show our gratitude to God. Love for Christ leads us to be grateful and obey His commandments (John 14:15).

The Church teaches us to be thankful even during difficult times and to say, “Glory to God” (*δόξα τῷ Θεῷ* in Greek), no matter what might happen. As Saint Peter of Damascus says, “Be mindful of God at all times, in all places, and in every circumstance. For no matter what you do, you should keep in mind the Creator of all things . . . everything you do becomes for you an occasion for glorifying God.”

The Samaritan’s faith, obedience, and thankfulness are a model for all of us. This is true, especially because without the grace of God, and if we are not near Him, our spiritual condition is not healthy, and we need His healing. Saint Gregory Palamas says, “The ten lepers are like the entire human race. All of us were lepers because we all had fallen into sin . . . but when the Lord descended from heaven and assumed our nature, He freed it from the condemnation which came from sin.”

It is by our faith in Christ that we hear His word, and we believe in Him and His love for us. He is always compassionate, and because of His love for us, He gives us the grace and the means to healing by His power. By obeying Him, we keep His commandments and do what He teaches us to do – even when we do not understand our circumstances and even when prayers seem to go unanswered.

It is by our love that we express our gratitude when we come to the Lord to worship at His feet and praise Him for His great love for us and His abundant provision for our lives. May we always be like the Samaritan, and former leper, who believed, obeyed, loved, and was grateful – for then we will hear the Lord say to us also, “Your faith has made you well!”