

Living by Faith

The Gospel reading for a Day of Thanksgiving, from St. Luke 17, is a familiar text. It's one of those Sunday School lessons we've heard since we were little – the healing of the Ten Lepers. “On the way to Jerusalem ... [Jesus] entered a village, [where] He was met by ten lepers ...”

Sometimes in our Sunday School lessons we don't hear the full impact of those words. Let me phrase that introduction in a little different way. The man Jesus, going to His death in Jerusalem, is met by ten dead lepers. Or, maybe this way – the good as dead Jesus is met by ten good as dead lepers on His way to Jerusalem.

Understanding the gravity of those words, leads us to hear the rest of the story differently as well.

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem – to His Calvary and Crucifixion. Standing at a distance are ten men with leprosy – a deadly disease – and one that also alienated them from society – from family, friends, even from the worship of God in the Temple.

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” is their cry. And from a distance comes His reply – “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

What? Are you surprised at this? Might you, and these lepers be expecting a different response? How about an immediate satisfaction – a miraculous healing, like the many Jesus has already performed? Is Jesus really sending them away from Himself – from He who is “the resurrection and the life”?

Is His prescription really just to do what the Law demands – to follow God's prescriptions for the one who has leprosy – to go show oneself to the priests at the Temple so that they might be diagnosed, and hopefully, declared to be clean and restored?

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us Go and show yourself to the priests.” Is that really His answer to their prayer. Do these dead-men-walking truly expect to receive mercy from the priests, and if so, what mercy? A word that says “God loves you” – “be content” – “do not be anxious about anything”?

“And as they went they were cleansed.” Did you catch that? They are still lepers when they turn and head toward Jerusalem to see the priests. It was “as they went” – as they were walking to Jerusalem – that they were healed.

Think about that for a moment. They knew their leprosy – they knew they were supposed to stay away from people and cry out “leper, leper” if anyone drew near. And yet, they “went” – putting one foot in front of the other – doing what God had commanded them to do.

It is “by faith” that they went – “and as they went they were cleansed.” As we heard in the Old Testament reading for today – and as we hear Jesus Himself say when the devil tempts Him in the wilderness – “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

“As they went” – one of these men, “when he saw that he was healed” – turned back and returned to Jesus. “Where are the other nine?” The Bible doesn’t tell us – but we would assume that they continue on their way to Jerusalem – to do what Master Jesus has told them to do – “show yourselves to the priests.”

They too follow God’s Word – live by the Word of God made flesh – Jesus. Seeing they are cleansed, no doubt they quickened their pace – maybe even an all-out sprint to the Temple complex to find a priest asap! Eager to hear the Word that restores their lives – for the Word and cleansing of Jesus has breathed life into them again. A day of thanksgiving for the new life they’ve been given.

The text however focuses us on the one man who returned to Jesus to give thanks. Seeing that he has been healed, he returns to the source of his healing – to Jesus – “praising God with a loud voice ... [falling] on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks.”

“Now he was a Samaritan.” Not the most likely candidate for the main character in a Biblical story. The Samaritan’s were a mixed breed – despised by many in Israel – denied as children of God – suspect as to whether God would have anything to do with them.

But what is not suspect is his faith – a faith that Jesus extols – a faith that saves. This man lived by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – and rather than continue towards Jerusalem and the Temple and the priests – he returns to this man, Jesus, because he believes that He is the mouth of God.

To praise Jesus is to praise God. To give thanks to Jesus is to give thanks to God. To live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – including that word which instructs the leper to show themselves to the priests in order to be restored – is to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jesus.

This man's faith confesses that Jesus is my Master, my God. Here is the source of my life – always has been, always will be. Here is where all thanksgiving is due.

Dearly beloved, you are not afflicted with leprosy – but you have your own troubles and sufferings. In your situations, to hear the Apostle Paul say – “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” – or, “do not be anxious about anything” – sounds about like the lepers hearing, “go show yourselves to the priests.”

To “live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” is to live by faith. Regardless of whether your ailments still adhere to your flesh, or you have been healed – to trust the Lord who tells you not to be anxious, but to present your requests to God – to set your needs before the source of your life, trusting in His mercy.

So, on this day of Thanksgiving we return to the source of our life, our cleansing, and receive His mercy. We fall at Jesus' feet, who gives us the medicine of immortality – His very own Body and Blood – cleansing us from all sin – strengthening and preserving us in body and soul – His Word guiding and leading us through the wilderness of this world to the Promised Land of heaven.

O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endures forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.