

Latin Mass Homily; 13th Sunday After Pentecost

+ In the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Ghost +

St. Teresa of Avila tells us; “In all created things discern the providence and wisdom of God, and in all things give Him thanks.” That is what we hear in today’s Gospel; give thanks...be grateful, but in truth, we hear so much more. Let’s set this scene;

You will recall Samaritans were despised by the Jews and yet here is Our Lord walking along the border between Samaria & Galilee...on His way to Jerusalem...where His Passion and death awaited Him. It is here that He met ten (10) lepers. Leprosy is a dreadful disease that affects the nervous system. Over time, a leper is unable to feel...they have no feeling. Perhaps that’s why the image of leprosy parallels the image of you and me when our hearts become hardened...when our willingness to love is compromised because we are unable to overcome our inclination toward sin?

When Jesus approached, the lepers stood off at a distance and, as they were required to do at that time, began to shout, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ While we may not shout, that is exactly what we acknowledge at the Penitential Rite of the Mass...and that is what we acknowledge when we enter into the Confessional...where we are made clean again. And much like us, in the Penitential Rite and in the Confessional, the lepers lift their voice and yell, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Asking for mercy is such an important part of our lives that St. Luke in the very next chapter of this Gospel tells the story of the tax collector. Like the lepers, he is equally despised and he also stood in the distance and pleaded, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” The despised lepers...the dreaded tax collector...you and I – all standing at a distance...each of us pleading for God’s mercy!

And Jesus gives them this instruction, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” Notice, He didn’t say, “You are healed!” He didn’t say, “If you show yourself to the priests you will be healed!” He said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” They could have replied, ‘but we are unclean,’ or they could have thought, ‘this will only humiliate us further,’ but instead, in an incredible act of faith, they went to show themselves to the priests, and along the way, all ten (10) were healed. I wonder, if I were one (1) of the ten (10), would have stayed and tried to negotiate a better deal,

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try to convince Our Lord that I was in need of an immediate healing, or if my own virtues of humility, faith and obedience would have been sufficient to allow me to leave Our Lord and present myself to the priests...men who I know despise me because of my illness...and my lowly status in society?

‘...And so it was, as they went, they were cleansed.’ These lepers were outcasts, they had no hope and no future other than misery, pain and loneliness. Imagine their joy...this is a life-changing, life-saving cleansing!

So think back to just a few moments ago, did our joy parallel the joy of the lepers during the Penitential Rite of this Mass, where if we were sincere in our sorrow & if we truly asked for God’s mercy, our venial sins were forgiven? Did our joy parallel the joy of the lepers the last time our sins were forgiven in the Sacrament of Confession? Will our joy parallel the joy of the lepers when we receive Our Lord’s body, blood, soul & divinity in the Eucharist a few moments from now? If not, we have to ask ourselves, why not?

Only one (1) of the ten (10) came back to give thanks and praise to God, & it was the leper Samaritan...the outcast of the outcasts...he’s the one who returned. And Luke tells us this was not just a simple word of appreciation. He knelt with his face on the ground, prostrated himself at the feet of Our Lord, & gave thanks.

This scene of gratitude reminds us of the seventh (7th) Chapter of Luke’s Gospel where the woman, aware of her many sins, was forgiven by Jesus, and she thanked Him by washing His feet with her tears, drying them with her hair and anointing them with expensive perfume. It’s at that point Our Lord tells us, ‘she loves much because she has been forgiven much.

Each one of us has been forgiven much! If each one of us were given just a small glimpse of how much we have been forgiven, would our love for Jesus compare to the love of the woman in the 7th Chapter of Luke’s Gospel...or the love of the Samaritan in today’s Gospel?

And Jesus said, ‘Were there not ten (10) cleansed? Where are the other nine (9)?’ There may be any number of reasons the nine (9) did not return. I have always given them a pass because I tend to think their personalities may be very much like mine...perhaps they are all rule followers. They were told to show

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themselves to the priests and that's exactly what they are going to do...and in truth we know that is one way we show our love to God, do what He commands!

But these nine (9) were so intent on obedience that they failed to thank the very One who made it possible for them to obey. The Samaritan, filled with gratitude, could not keep himself from what his new life demanded...thanking and loving the One who made him whole. He knew the most the priests could do is say, "Yes, you have been healed." The Samaritan knew for obedience to be an act of love it must be rooted in an appreciative heart...so he returned to give thanks.

And Jesus says to him, "Your faith has made you well!" But, by returning to give thanks, the Samaritan was not being disobedient for even though he did not show himself to the priests, he returned and showed himself to The Eternal High Priest, who told him what each of us long to hear, "Your faith has made you well!" Be assured God never tires of us returning to Him to give Him thanks or to sincerely seek His mercy...it's us who grow weary of returning to Him.

In a certain way, we're all lepers. And it's Jesus who heals us, who makes us whole, who gives us the path to everlasting life, and it's Jesus who, when we love the way He asks us to love, guides us so that we do not become lepers again.

So, once healed, we want to thank Him by serving Him and we so often run off and do many good and necessary things...but in serving Him we sometimes forget to love Him, to thank and worship Him or to sit at His feet and simply listen to Him. We get so busy doing 'things' that we forget about Him...and that is when we are more like the lepers who never return to give thanks. We forget, we too are lepers who have been healed.

So, take time, don't let the busyness of this back to school season get the best of you, sit at His feet, do less, but love more. Come back, be thankful that you have received God's mercy!

I will leave you today with these beautiful words from St. Therese of Lisieux; "Prayer is an aspiration of the heart. It's a simple glance directed to Heaven. It's a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy."

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