

9.18.2022 Trinity 14 (Galatians 5:16-24; Luke 17:11-19)

In today's Gospel, we read about Jesus entering into a certain village, where He was met by ten men that were lepers. These outcasts "*stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 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.*" You'll remember that one of these lepers, "*when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.*" To this leper, Jesus said, "*Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole*" (Luke 17:11-19).

As we begin to reflect on the passages appointed for this Sunday, the first truth I would ask you to consider is found in the Gospel, and that truth is this: The cleansing and healing of our soul is the work of God. Our Lord's interaction with these lepers, most especially with the one leper who turned back to give thanks, and in doing so, was healed in both body and soul presents us with this comfortable truth that is repeated in different ways throughout Holy Scripture, the truth that "*we neither make nor save ourselves...*" (Ephesians 2:10 MSG). It was God who knit us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), and it is God who cleanses and heals a sin-sick soul.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul expressed that truth when he was inspired to write this familiar verse, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*" (Ephesians 2:8). In a letter to Titus, Paul said it like this, God "*saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy...*" (Titus 3:5), and St. John stated that truth using these words, he wrote, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9).

The cleansing and healing of our soul is the work of God, and through the example of these lepers who "*lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,*" we learn that to experience such mercy in our own lives, we must, by the grace of God cry out to Jesus (John 6:44), humbly declaring how desperately we need that which we cannot earn, do not deserve, and what only He can provide: cleansing and healing. When we recognize that, apart from Christ, in a spiritual sense we are far worse off than these lepers, when we admit that on our own we cannot heal our spiritual leprosy, and then, when we bring our disease to the only One who can, again, in the words

of St. John, our Lord is *faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. We rest in this promise that Jesus heals all who cry out to Him. We find peace in the blessed assurance that He casts none out, for everyone who lifts up their voice and “*calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Romans 10:13).

Our Gospel reading this morning is a vivid, historical account of the day when, by the grace and mercy of Almighty God, a group of outcast lepers were given back their life. On that day our Lord spoke the Word that healed them. He said, “*Go show yourselves unto the priests,*” and as they went, they were cleansed. Jesus spoke then, He speaks today, and one of the parallels we recognize between the physical healing the lepers received and the spiritual healing we have received is that God, and God alone, cleanses and heals our soul. He did for the leper what the leper could not do for himself, and He does for us that which we cannot do for ourselves: He heals our spiritual leprosy. He sets us free from sin and death (Romans 6:18-23). He sets us free from the “*works of the flesh*” (Galatians 5:19) that St. Paul wrote about in today’s Epistle.

In the Epistle, Paul spoke of the works of the flesh, and the fruit of the Spirit. He tells us these things are “*opposed to each other*” (Galatians 5:17). While one, the works of the flesh, lead to death, the other, the fruit of the Spirit, is a manifestation of life, the life and love of God in us. St. Paul listed, on one side, the works of the flesh as these: “*Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*” (5:19-20). These are things that lead to death. Paul lists these works of the flesh and then, writing to Christians, declares, “*I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (5:21 ESV).

St. Paul is writing to Christians, warning them, warning us, about the seriousness of sin, and our Lord’s interaction with the lepers in the Gospel reading helps us gain a greater understanding of his inspired words. When we consider the works of the flesh, works that lead to death, from the perspective of the Gospel passage, what we discover is that such works are a sign of spiritual leprosy, the kind of spiritual leprosy that stands in direct opposition to the cleansing and healing our Lord so freely and graciously provides to all who cry out to Him. It is the spiritual leper who, on one side, by thought, word, and deed, directly opposes God, and it is the humble, penitent soul

who, on the other side, lifts up their voice and cries out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on me.” It is this soul that our Lord cleanses and heals. It is to this thankful soul that Jesus says, “*Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole*” (Luke 17:19).

To the soul He has cleansed and healed, in the Gospel Jesus said, “*Arise, go thy way.*” To the person who has “*crucified the flesh*” (Galatians 5:24), in the Epistle Paul said, “*Walk in the Spirit.*” Our Savior Christ has set us free. He commands us to Arise. He calls us to walk in the Spirit. He equips us with the grace and strength to bear the fruit of the Spirit, which Paul tells us is “*love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*” (5:22-23). This is the good fruit by which we are known to be His disciples (John 13:35), the good fruit that draws the world to Him.

In the passages appointed for this Sunday, we learned that the cleansing and healing of our soul is the work of God. Almighty God does for us that which we cannot do for ourselves: He brings us from spiritual leprosy to life everlasting. Now, as children of God, a people cleansed and restored, called and equipped, this time He has given us is our opportunity to turn back, and with a loud voice glorify God. This day, and every day, is our opportunity to respond to His grace and mercy with a humble spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Therefore, may we *arise* and by His grace *walk in the Spirit* by seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). May we *arise* and in His strength *walk in the Spirit* by following the footsteps of the saints. May we *arise* and to His glory *walk in the Spirit* by uniting our selves, our souls and bodies to the One “*who died for us so that... we might live with Him*” (1 Thessalonians 5:10).