

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
October 13, 2019

+

In the incident of Christ cleansing the ten lepers, a little reminder is helpful. The official verdict of cleanliness could only be given after a proper sacrifice. So said *The Book of Leviticus*. That is why the Jewish lepers had to make a journey to Jerusalem to show themselves to the priests. In ancient Judaism there were no neighborhood parish priests! The priests were attached to the Jerusalem Temple. People went *there* to offer sacrifice. The Holy Family went to Jerusalem for Candlemas.

So at the end of the encounter with Jesus the ten lepers went to Jerusalem. When only one of the cleansed lepers returned to give thanks, it does not follow the other nine were ungrateful. The Jews among them were obeying the Law to go to Jerusalem. Their return could not be expected for a few days at the very least. Their absence is no proof of their ingratitude to Jesus. And, after all, their giving “glory to God” could be done anywhere. They did not know what *we* know, that Jesus is God Incarnate.

St Luke’s Gospel is interested in Samaritans. He alone has the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke alone tells this incident of the ten lepers, with the one returning being a Samaritan. This makes us wonder if St Luke had taken an original incident involving Our Lord and expanded the story for his own special reasons. Is it possible that in Luke’s own day the Christians were pushing back on Samaritans in the same way the Jews did? Was Luke addressing a need to pull down such a barrier? Those are the types of questions Bible scholars ask. And they can easily turn a Sunday sermon into a research paper.

You and I should think highly of the lepers....*all ten of them*. They met Christ as He entered a village and were not put off by thoughts He might be weary and needed rest. They were urgent to press their case, and they did this even though the Law required lepers to keep their distance. These lepers knew their place and I wonder if we know ours as well! And knowing it, they were not ashamed to cry for mercy. They were all so humble. Their condition was desperate and tragic and yet it did not occur to them to tell Jesus what to do. They only appealed to the *compassion* of Christ.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
October 13, 2019

+

In His response the Lord tested their obedience. He said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” He did not tell them they would be cured for their efforts, but to act *as if they had been cured*. Yet not one of them is recorded as saying, “that’s not good enough, Lord.” You remember when Elisha told Naaman, also a leper, to go wash in the Jordan River, Naaman balked at first, saying the rivers of Syria were better than any Jewish river. Not so these men. They had satisfied themselves in advance that Jesus had the power to heal, and they had the grace to obey His directions.

Doing what the Lord commanded was a great act of faith. Remember Christ once said, “All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them and ye shall have them.” That is what these lepers were doing as they went along to Jerusalem to show themselves to the priests. And they were healed. All ten were cleansed. Yes, thanksgiving is an essential part of our religion, and the one who came back to give thanks to Jesus found more: he found his Lord and Saviour. But that part of the incident may reflect St Luke’s special interest in Samaritans.

Souls are more often liable to lament over some real or imagined *bete-noir* and yet refuse the cure to be found in the observance of an obvious course of duty. But in this incident with the lepers, another important message is clear. When we are found practicing the precepts of our religion, we are told we can expect God to meet us with mercy. Theologians call this *cooperating with grace*. And the lepers have given us a master class.