

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Trinity XVI
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rmcneely+

... but where are the nine?

Let's consider the Gospel for this week for a moment.

We should note that

None of the other Gospelers write about this event.

And that St Luke saw something in it

that none of the others saw.

Let's try to work out why he included it.

On the surface it looks like a story about good manners

Please and thank you.

Or perhaps gratitude.

Of course, it touches all those things,

but Luke must have seen more

something more important.

So let's dig a little deeper.

Leprosy was an incurable and horrible disease in Jesus' day.

It was much feared and its victims were reviled.

So much so that they were separated from society

And lived in hovels on the outskirts of town.

They walked with a bell

which they had to ring

whenever anyone else approached them,

And had to cry out "unclean, unclean"

when someone else came near.

The laws, customs and practices built figurative walls around them:

They could not get close to other people
 They could not participate in the social life of the village
 They could not attend services at Temple or synagogues.
 Which was the heart of Jewish life.

Lepers were effectively separated and sealed away
 from normal life.

As a result, they lived miserable, impoverished and solitary lives,
 While the progressive disease ate them up.

In a way, the life they lived is like our lives when infected with
 Greivous sin.

We too, can become separated from friends and family
 When sin invades our lives.

Some tend to withdraw unto themselves when they commit sin.
 Too embarrassed or ashamed to be around other people.

We may separate ourselves from God
 For fear of His punishment or correction.
 And become isolated.
 Stay away from church, from the sacraments
 From God.

In a spiritual condition akin to the misery of the Lepers in today's
 Gospel.

Let's call the spiritual equivalent of leprosy . . . separosy:
 The separation of ourselves from God, from the Church, from
 friends and relatives.

A separation that our sins sometimes bring.

The story of the 10 Lepers begins to take on a new sense.

If we think of the 10 as being separated from God by their sins
Having contracted the spiritual disease of “separosy”.
Then, Jesus recognizing the spiritual disorder, goes to work.

He gave them instruction: “Go. Show yourselves to the priests”.

That may seem like an unusual thing to say.
However, it fell to the priests to examine them
and make the determination as to their cure of the disease.
If he found them clear of the disease
and otherwise ritually cleansed,
He would declare it and admit them.

Without Jesus speaking a word or making any kind of gesture
As they went, they were cured of their disease.

Go to church was His instruction. The Church is the cure for
“separosy”. It is in prayer and in worship and in the sacraments
that we are restored to God.

The ten obeyed His command.
Without comment,
without question
and without objection, they obeyed.

On their way to the church, we learn they were cleansed.
Notice; Luke does not tell us they were healed.

They were cleansed.
Jesus cleansed them of their sin,
of their separation.

In baptism our sins are washed away and we are restored to life
with God.

When we receive Communion our sinful bodies are made clean by
His body and our souls washed through His most precious blood.

The ten lepers were cleansed
 and so could return to the temple to worship,
 could return to God,
 just as we are cleansed and restored to God in the sacraments.
 We are delivered from evil and opened again to the influence
 and reception of heavenly grace and charity.

One of the lepers turns back falls to Jesus' feet and glorifies God
 with a loud voice.

And he is a Samaritan.

The parable is another reminder that the God of Abraham,
 Isaac and Jacob is the God of all mankind.

Then Jesus asks the questions that make this parable stand out:
Were there not 10 cleansed? But where are the nine?

Is Jesus criticizing the ungrateful 9?

Making some comment of social etiquette about please and thank
 you?

Perhaps.

But if we think of the story as a parable, there may be a deeper and
 richer message.

Jesus was approaching the crucifixion
 and He used this long walk from Galilee
 to the Mediterranean Sea
 and back to Jerusalem
 to teach the Apostles what they would need to know
 after the Ascension.

Was Jesus using the occasion of the ten lepers to teach the Apostles
 and to teach us the unending and overwhelming nature of God's
 forgiveness?

“Were there not 10” is to point out that the entire group of men had sought His mercy and the entire group of men had been cleansed of their sins.

The 10 men represent all mankind in the parable. It is a revolutionary concept 2000 years ago,
 and Jesus is reinforcing the fact
 that if they truly repent
 and seek forgiveness,
 all mankind will be forgiven.

Even the ugly putrid sores of the leper were cleansed
 so the sores and wounds of our soul can be cleansed.

“ . . . but what of the nine?”

Jesus asks a rhetorical question.

He is directing the Apostles
 and He is directing us
 to the 9 who were cleansed
 and who were given a new start in life,
 but who failed to return to God.

He directs the Apostles to the 9 and asks “what will become of them?”.

What are the Apostles to do,
 what are we to do
 for those who have been part of a miracle
 but who can’t see the hand of God in it
 and can’t take the Hand of God and return to Him?

They remind me of the man who was lost for days in the forest.
 He was describing his experience and his desperation and fear to a reporter and he said that in the end he even knelt down on the ground and prayed to God to be saved from starvation.

The reporter asked him if his prayers were answered and he said
 “Oh no . Before God could answer my prayer, a ranger happened along by chance and led me to safety.

The parable concludes with the Samaritan at Jesus feet praising God.

Jesus tells him what all of us long to hear Him say: “Arise. Go thy way. Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

The Samaritan had been cleansed/forgiven
and had returned to God in Christ
with praise and thanksgiving.

Just as we do here at St Thomas today.

He had truly and earnestly repented of his sins,

he had received the forgiveness of God

and all his sins were washed away.

The wall of sin separating him from God.

His seprosy

had been cured.

But unlike the 9;

the Samaritan had taken the Hand of God

and returned to Him.

His faith had made him WHOLE. He was fully restored to God.

Can you imagine what the rest of his life must have been like?

So the parable of the 10 lepers is ended.

How does it inform our lives? So what?

The story of the 10 lepers contains many lessons for us to take with us as we reenter the world this morning. We have considered only a few:

1. We should recognize that we may become as the lepers,
unclean and isolated before God and Man.

When we allow ourselves to be separated from God,

(when we contract “separasy” of our souls)

the only way out

the only cure,

is to fall to our knees and seek God's mercy,
His grace
and His help.

Once we have become separated from God,
our sins follow separasy inexorably.

Sin begins to build a wall between us and God
and between us and each other.

Seek Him at the first sign of separosy.

2. We should respond as the lepers did: with obedient faith.
3. We should recognize the cleansing,
respond as the Samaritan did,
glorify God at the feet of Jesus
with thankful hearts
and accept the opportunity to restore our lives with God.
4. We must follow our faith and we will be made whole, one with God.
5. We mustn't be one of the 9.

Amen.

