

## SERMON - The Healing of the Ten Lepers, Luke 17:12-19, December 8, 2019

Leprosy is an infectious disease that causes severe, disfiguring skin sores and nerve damage in the arms, legs, and skin areas around the body. In our Savior's time, there was no medical treatment for leprosy and the disease was considered contagious. Couple this with the fact that the Hebrews considered anyone with leprosy to be ritually "unclean" or "impure," all lepers were shunned by society and forced to live in leper colonies far away from the cities and towns. Today leprosy can be treated and cured. However, any nerve damage resulting from leprosy cannot be cured. We know today that leprosy is only contagious if you come into contact with secretions from the nose or mouth of a leper. Otherwise, you cannot catch leprosy from being within the proximity of a leper. In today's Gospel ten lepers cry out to Jesus for help. The Lord heals all ten lepers and tells them to show themselves to the priests so that they may be deemed clean and pure and permitted once again to live in society and to worship in the Temple. As the lepers walk to the priests and discover that they are healed, only one of them does the right thing and returns to our Savior to offer thanks. This cured leper shows heartfelt humility and gratitude and falls down at the feet of Jesus, offering to the Lord his sincere and humble thanks. And - you guessed it - this one leper who offers thanks is a Samaritan. In the life of Jesus, it's always the stranger, the outcast, the one who is shunned who does the right thing, while the chosen people of God always seem to do the wrong thing. This is a lesson for all of us. Titles, ethnic backgrounds, membership in particular churches or groups mean absolutely nothing if you do not follow through and become true members in heart, soul and mind: by what you do and how you live your life, as well as how you treat others, and not merely externally or in name only. The nine other lepers may have been cleansed and healed externally, but they remained leprous and sick spiritually in their hearts. Their spiritual sickness was much worse than the external leprosy from which they suffered. Physicians may heal biological illnesses, but it is up to us whether or not our hearts are healed. The Lord may offer to us His saving grace and mercy, but it is up to us whether or not we choose to heed and accept our Savior. It is up to us whether or not we choose good over evil, right instead of wrong, love instead of hatred, forgiveness instead of revenge. It is up to us if we are generous or selfish. It is up to us whether or not we care about others or care only about ourselves. It is up to us if we have a demeanor of sincerity and honesty, or one of deceit and hypocrisy. It is up to us if we follow the truth or if we follow the deception of lies. It is up to us whether or not God is the center of our lives, or if our life is centered on earthly pleasure, ambition, power and gain. The word Eucharist means to give thanks. It is up to us if we imitate the Samaritan and come to church to participate in the Eucharist and give thanks unto God, or whether we choose to imitate the other nine lepers and be Orthodox in name only and not come to church in order to offer thanks by participating in the Eucharist. The Lord said, "If you do not eat my Body (literally *flesh*) and drink my Blood, then you have no life in you" (John 6:53). The choice is ours. The Lord heals all of the lepers, but he forces none of them to follow through and offer thanks. They must make that choice on their own. Only one, the outcast and stranger, follows through, offers thanks and is saved. The other nine condemn themselves, because they do not follow through, so the healing they received from the Lord was not unto their salvation, but unto their condemnation. It was their choice, just as the choice is ours.

The unique characteristic of the early Christians was that they devoted their lives to helping and serving those in need—the sick, the hungry, the poor, the shunned, the abused, the orphans, the abandoned, the hated, even those in prison, whether for just cause or not. Philanthropy and philanthropic groups and social or governmental systems, for the most part, simply did not exist in our Savior's time. Care for those in need was done on an individual basis. For the most part, if you suffered from need or want or injustice, there was no solution or help to be gotten. Christianity revolutionized the world and humanity's way of thinking by her acts of good deeds and philanthropy. In theory this should still be the center of activity of the Church, yet, for the most part, it seems to not be so. I am not here to judge anyone or accuse anyone for lack of good deeds. I would only offer that we might think about how, perhaps, we may better fulfill our responsibility as Christians. Remember, there is always the possibility that we may be Christians in name only and not in actual deeds, or only very weakly and poorly in our deeds. When I attended the Diocesan Assembly in East Meadow, L.I., I rejoiced when I learned that Holy Trinity Church (who hosted the assembly) prepares and offers a free dinner every month to everyone in the community. I rejoiced, because this seemed to me to be a real and authentic step closer to the early Christian practice and ideal of philanthropy. I'm not knocking what we do now. We collect food for Unity House, we offer donations in our Needy Box, we sponsor a great Christmas seminarians' gift project. We donate to IOCC coin boxes, and we have special collections for worthy causes. Many of us donate to the Diocesan Benefactor's Fund. We volunteer at the Latham Food Bank, and many of us give to those in need on our

own on an individual basis. I brought this up at a Parish Council Meeting. We have a wonderful Church Center. We have the facility. Do we have the volunteers, do we have the ability to make a free dinner once a month and open up our Center to the community like Holy Trinity parish in East Meadow?. This may sound selfish, but the more we do for others, the more blessings we receive back in return from God. We do good, however, not because we seek some kind of recompense in return, but purely out of love, care and concern. Perhaps we just don't have the available man and woman power in our parish to keep a steady schedule of people who will be able to volunteer on a monthly basis in order to undertake such a great act of charity. I'm not judging anyone. There are only so many hours in a day and only so many days in a week. But I also fear God, and on judgement day I don't want to spend my time offering excuses but I want my actions and the way I lived my life to speak for itself. Holy Trinity was my parish when I was in high school, and I'm proud of how they are expressing the work of Christ in their parish and in their lives. I am proud of you here at St. Basil's, and how you also have inculcated Christ in this parish and in your lives. But we must never feel satisfied and think that we have done enough. The correct attitude, if we wish to be saved, is to always feel a sense of urgency that we have not done nearly enough. It behooves us to always try to think of ways of how we can do better. May our merciful Lord help and guide us as we struggle in our humble way to fulfill the life in Christ and increase our love and service for our fellow human beings. Amen!