

SERMON: Healing of the Ten Lepers, Luke 17:12-19, December 10, 2017

Under the Law in the Old Testament, the Jews understood leprosy to be a physical manifestation of an ungodly inner disposition of treachery, anger malice and wrath. In fact, anyone who suffered any illness or misfortune was judged as being punished for some sort of sin committed by that person. When the Lord permitted that Job, who was supremely righteous and without guilt before God, should suffer horrible illness and the loss of his family and so much else, he was judged to be suffering because of some secret sin that he must have committed. When his onlookers couldn't extract any kind of acknowledgement or confession from him for committing some sort of sin, his wife told him, "You still keep your integrity? Blaspheme God and die."

Jesus came to heal us not only of the leprosy of the body but primarily of the leprosy of the soul. Lepers were forbidden to enter the cities and associate with anyone. They were ostracized and shunned. They could no longer worship in the Temple. They were outcasts and considered dregs of society. They received no love or pity, only hatred and judgment. In today's Gospel Jesus is outside of the village limits, and ten lepers from afar off call out to Him and ask Him to have mercy on them. Jesus doesn't hesitate. He tells them to go to the priests and while on their way Jesus heals them. If someone was healed from their leprosy, the Jewish Law required that a priest examine them to verify that they were completely healed and cured, and only then could they be readmitted to society and allowed to worship in the Temple.

Brothers and sisters, you and I are all spiritually ill with the leprosy of sin. Just as it was necessary to go to the priest before their healing was complete, it is necessary for us to go to the priest to confess our sins in order for the healing of the leprosy of our soul to be complete. In Matthew 16:19 and again in Matthew 18:18 Jesus gives His apostles the authority over sin: "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven." In John 20:23 Jesus tells the Apostles, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In James 5:16 it says, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." We who have sinned, even if we were to give up sin and repent, cannot receive forgiveness on our own. We must first go to him who has authority from God to remit sins and show him by confessing out loud how our soul has been eaten away by the leprosy of sin, in order to receive from him the full assurance of forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters, I can't promise you that you will never suffer from physical illness in this life. I can't promise that you will never suffer or experience sorrow in this life, no matter how righteously you may live and no matter how deep is your faith in God. Jesus told us that we will always have illness. Jesus Himself suffered and had to carry His Cross. Jesus told us that if we are to be His disciples, it is necessary for us to take up our cross and follow Him. I can't promise you or tell you anything different than what Jesus promised or said. But I can promise you this. I can promise you that you will have peace and consolation in your hearts if you have faith and trust in the Lord. I can promise you that if we bear our sorrows and misfortunes with patience, then God will give us joy and eternal life. How can we compare this short life with eternity? Is 50, 60, 70, 80 or even a hundred years a long time? How about forever? I think forever is a long time. Isn't it worth it for us to accept our temporary struggles and hardships when God has promised us the Kingdom of Heaven? Brothers and sisters, that is why God created us. God created us so that we might inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. In Mark 8:36 it says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" Ten lepers were healed of their physical leprosy, but only one, a Samaritan, a stranger, is healed of the leprosy of his soul, because only he came back and fell down at the feet of Jesus and gave thanks. May we imitate this one Samaritan and not be like the other nine. May we too turn back to the Lord, fall down at His feet and offer Him our thanks. May we too repent and

confess our sins receive complete forgiveness and healing. May we too share in the joy, peace and salvation that is promised to those who love God the Father and His Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Grace and power of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.