

DO MIRACLES OCCUR IN OUR TIMES?
The Lord Cleanses Ten Lepers, Luke 17:12-19

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In ancient times leprosy was considered to be a highly contagious disease. There was no treatment for leprosy. Therefore, lepers were forbidden to come into contact with the town folk and were exiled outside the city environs and forced to live in leper colonies. According to Jewish law lepers were considered “unclean” and banned from temple worship. And of course Jews were forbidden to come into contact with lepers, for anyone coming into contact with a leper would be considered unclean as well. We know today that although contagious, leprosy does not spread easily. Treatment is available but must be done early in order to avoid permanent disability. On the way to Jerusalem, between Samaria and Galilee, ten lepers at a distance, calling Him Master (Teacher), beg Jesus to free them from their misery.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem tells us that “no one pitied them...but He Who had appeared on earth for this very reason, and had become man that He might show pity unto all...was moved with compassion...and had mercy upon them.”¹ The way that Jesus cleanses the lepers is very interesting. He does not merely say “be clean” and effect the healing. Instead He tells them to go and show themselves to the priests. The priests would verify the cleansing, because they were experienced in knowing the marks of leprosy, and they would be able to verify the cleansing as well as perform the necessary ritual and prayers in order for the cleansed lepers to be assimilated back into the community. The actual healing took place as they were walking to the temple to see the priests. Nine of the lepers were Jews and one was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were shunned by the Jews and treated as strangers. Only the Samaritan, the one cleansed leper who was not a Jew, returns to Jesus in order to give thanks.

So who saw this miracle? Those who had faith understood that the miracle had taken place because above all they saw with their hearts. Those who lacked faith would say that they saw nothing with their own eyes and that there was no miracle. When Jesus gave sight to the man who had been born blind, the Jewish leaders refused to believe that a miracle had taken place. They repeatedly interrogated the man who had been born blind, as well as his parents. This was not a sincere investigation in order to ascertain the truth, but a desire to seek information to use for disparaging and disavowing that a miracle had actually taken place. For you see, the Jewish leaders had already made up their minds that there was no miracle. It didn't matter to them whether or not a miracle had actually taken place. Out of malice, hatred and because of their guilty consciences they already decided that Jesus did not and could not perform miracles. And much worse than this, they wanted to see Him die. Those who had faith and believed in Jesus as Lord readily accepted the miracles. Even though Jesus would often instruct those whom He healed to tell no one what had occurred except when necessary, such as the lepers who were required to show themselves to the priests, those who were healed usually spread the word of what Jesus had done for them. Isn't it very hard to contain ourselves and not tell others when we experience a great joy in our lives? Whether seen with their eyes, whether understood by circumstances, or whether learned by word of mouth, those who had faith, in their hearts, readily believed in the truth of the miracles, whereas those who lacked faith and whose hearts had grown cold and turned to stone rejected the veracity of Jesus' miracles, no matter what they saw or heard. For example, if the Jews who rejected Jesus had believed in the miracles, then why would they ask Jesus to show them a sign so that they might believe (Matt. 12:33-45)? Hadn't Jesus performed countless miracles and signs already?

Like those in the time of Jesus who said that there were no miracles, many people today also say that there are no miracles. St. Philaret of Moscow says that the Lord still performs miracles today, but for various reasons some may not see or experience them. It could be, for example, due to our lack of faith or hardness of heart that our spiritual eyes are darkened and

we have difficulty seeing the miracles of God. St. Philaret asks, “How can miracles be accomplished in us by prayer when our prayer is short, cold, inattentive, and offered up, not so much in faith and filial love to God, as in a sort of an involuntary submission to His law?”² It is not only approaching God and praying in a perfunctory way that hinders us from experiencing the miracles of God. St. Philaret goes on to say, “How can the Sacraments work miracles in us, if we approach them but from absolute necessity, without a careful previous purification, without an ardent aspiration to be united to God?”³

I have heard many times from those who have shared with me how God has worked miracles in their lives. Things sometimes occur which are much more than mere coincidence or just too specific and timely to be merely incidental or to have occurred only by chance. How many times for those of us who believe have our hearts and spiritual eyes been opened to see and experience the direct action and power of God? Sometimes the actions of God can be more subtle and not as blatant. Other times God’s miracles can be very clear and obvious. Yet time and time again God seems to always send us the right people at the right time, or create just the right circumstances when they are most needed in our lives. How many of us who believe in the Lord, who trust in Him and pray to him, how many of us can sincerely say that we have never experienced the mercy and compassion of our Savior? Let us pray to God that He will strengthen our faith. Let us also pray to the Lord with David as he prays in his psalm, “Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me” (Psalm 86 [85]:17). Amen.

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1. “Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke,” St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983, page 465.
 2. “Select Sermons,” Philaret Metropolitan of Moscow, Eastern Orthodox Books, reprinted from “Select Sermons by the Late Metropolitan of Moscow Philaret,” London: J. Masters, 1873), page 29.
 3. Ibid, page 29.