

Homily.28OrdC.10.9.22
Saint Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

THE SAVING OF THE LEPER

The message of today's Gospel seems simple enough. Jesus heals 10 lepers. Only one of them thanks Him. So it's all about gratitude, or the lack of it.

But there's a lot more to the story.

For example, why did Jesus travel through Samaria?

Samaria was south of Galilee, so going through Samaria was the shortest route from Galilee to Jerusalem, which was where Jesus was headed.

But in Chapter 9 of Luke's gospel, He is rejected by the Samaritans. Besides that, because of the mutual dislike between Jews and Samaritans, if Jews in Galilee wanted to go to Jerusalem, they first went east, crossed the Jordan and went around Samaria, avoiding religious contamination.

And who were the Samaritans, exactly. Well, they were the remnant of the northern Jewish kingdom resulting from the split in the tribes of Jacob. Their religion was essentially Jewish, though the Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Jewish scriptures. Over time, some Samaritans intermarried with pagans. Samaria built its own temple on Mount Garizim, where they worshipped instead of going to Jerusalem. The Samaritans sided with enemies of the Jews during various conflicts. The Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple in 108 B.C.

So the fact that Jesus decided to walk through Samaria was very significant. It was a clue that Jesus, in addition to spending most of His time with the Jews, also wanted to reach out to non-Jews. Jesus was for the whole world.

It's at least worth mentioning that the 9 Jewish lepers who did not come back to thank Jesus should at least get some credit for associating with the Samaritan leper. It's often true that the poor and the outcasts of society overlook differences with one another and find ways to support each other. As the saying goes, misery loves company. And that's a good thing. Sometimes it helps to be miserable.

Now here's the main point of this evening's Gospel. It's about more than showing gratitude.

The 10th leper received more than a healing. He received his salvation. As Jesus says at the end of the Gospel, "Stand up and go, your faith has saved you."

This raises the most important question in life: What did the 10th leper do that resulted in his salvation?

Let's do the math.

He called Jesus “Master.”

He asked Jesus to have pity on him and the other lepers.

He obeyed Jesus by going to show himself to the priest.

He returned, glorifying God in a loud voice.

He fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked Him.

What can we learn from the experience of this leper about what it takes to be saved?

Two most important things.

First, the leper knew something unique and significant about Jesus. Even before his healing, he identified Jesus as his Master.

Secondly, he experienced the power of Jesus and, having been blessed by that power, humbled himself before Jesus and praised Him.

Let me ask all of you this evening this most important issue in life using a hypothetical situation.

Let’s say you died an hour from now. As you approach the gates of heaven, St. Peter calls out: “Why should I let you in?” What would you say? What would your answer be?

Common answers to this question are: “I’m a good person. I try to be nice to people. I’m kind to others. I go to Mass whenever I can.”

Notice how, in all of these typical responses, we are giving ourselves credit for getting into heaven.

If we learn from the grateful leper in tonight’s Gospel, we could say something like this:

“Jesus is my Master. He is my Lord and Savior. He saved me by dying on the cross for me. Through His presence in my life, I experienced His power and received graces I never could have received on my own. I want to be with Him for eternity.”

Jesus should get all the credit for our salvation. He does the work. We just have to cooperate fully with Him.

For our salvation, we need to know Jesus and to receive Him into our lives, making Him the center of our lives. When we do this, we will experience His power in our lives. We will love Him for giving His life for us and making it possible for us to live a life of grace that we could never live without Him.

The life that Jesus makes available to us is described very beautifully in this passage from the 2nd Letter of Saint Peter:

“God’s divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature.”

Can each of us say that we are sharing the divine life, the divine nature of Jesus and God the Father, that our Catholic faith makes available to us?

We receive the life of Jesus every time we come to Mass. What difference is His presence in us making in our lives? Are we experiencing the fullness of His power, of the graces He wants to share with us?

How are our lives different, how are they better, richer, more fulfilling, than those who are not able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist?

May we be open to, may we ask for and receive, the glory and power that come from the life of Jesus being poured into us every time we receive Jesus at Mass.

Then, like the 10th leper, we will fall at the feet of Jesus and thank Him.