**Luke 17:12-19 Ten Lepers**

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Today’s gospel lesson is appropriate during this Nativity season because it deals with giving gifts and the gratitude, we have for receiving them. In this lesson, the gift is life.

Leprosy in the ancient world was not only devastating psychologically but it was a chronic infection that disfigured your skin and affected your nerves and organs. The ancients knew that it was contagious but they didn’t know how to cure it. So, the only thing to do was to isolate anyone who was symptomatic. For the person who was afflicted with the disease it meant complete loneliness, constant pain and the thought that the disease would eventually take their life. We could say that it was like the early days of AIDS when there was not only the stigma of the disease but there was no treatment for it and it was an eventual death sentence.

Unfortunately, there were no clear diagnostics in the ancient world, so anyone who presented anything looking like leprosy was ostracized from the community and labeled a leper. Some diseases that looked like leprosy were curable. So this is why some were healed from their ailment. In order to be brought back into the community, the individual would have to present themselves to the priest. Therefore Christ tells the Samaritan to go and show yourself to the priest otherwise he could be stoned for resuming contact with others without the priest’s approval.

In this context of today’s lesson, the small group of 10 lepers represents the world. Although we do not carry leprosy, we carry the stain of sin. We are totally and completely bound by sin just as the leprous men were bound by their wounds. The only way for the lepers to rid themselves of their wounds and for us to rid ourselves of the stain of sin is through Christ.

These ten lepers were probably of mixed peoples, since Christ acknowledges one of them to be a Samaritan. In ancient times, if you were a leper, everyone would all be classed together—Jew, Samaritan—it made no difference they had to remain far away from the regular population and they could not enter villages and communicate with people.

However, what is significant is that only one of the ten returns to thank Christ for the miracle that he performed. We are now left with one who returns and nine who have gone away. The one who returns signifies unity; both the unity with God and the unity of the members of the Church. However the nine who did not return remains a mystery. Did the nine who did not return and give thanks remain healed or did their leprous wounds return as a result of not coming back to thank Christ. We do not know because the gospel doesn’t tell us.

We can also say that the nine lepers represent the mysterious world that still has yet to accept Christ as the messiah. They have turned their backs on Christ even though it is through him that the world exists. They have yet to realize where their existence comes from.

What the crux of the lesson deals with is gratitude. We often take it for granted the gifts that God has given us—when the gifts are given to us we simply forget where they came from. This lack of gratitude has a larger implication—it is precisely a lack of consciousness of God in our lives. If were cognizant of God, we would then be in constant gratitude of what he has given us and be praising him constantly for what he has given to us.

Think of a time when there was a crisis in our life. Maybe we were hospitalized for a life threatening illness and we recovered from it. Did we come to church and thank God for it? Did we make any significant offering to the church or to the less fortunate for his blessings upon us?

Gratitude for things bestowed upon us not only involves our relationship with God but with our fellow neighbor as well. How many of us take it for granted what others do for us. Do we appropriately payback those who go out of our way us? Next time someone does something for us no matter how minor it is, be sure it is acknowledged with gratitude.

The lesson of gratitude comes at an appropriate time in the Nativity season. We need to show gratitude knowing that God is concerned for our salvation and was willing to condescend in the form of a servant in hopes that we would change our leprous ways and become one with God.

To many of us, the season is marked with giving and receiving physical gifts. Let’s remember that the gift of love to each other is the highest gift we can ever give not material things.

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