

PENTECOST XIII

In today's Gospel reading St. Luke speaks of the encounter between Jesus and the ten lepers. They were standing at the edge of the crowd and seeing the Lord cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." In point of fact their appeal to the Christ is that constant prayer of the Church which expresses confidence in God's mercy and forgiveness. In the Gospel the lepers are cured of their physical illness. The great St. Augustine makes a point of saying that the verb used is "cleansed," and image of our own cleansing from the disease of sin, particularly mortal sin which brings spiritual death to our souls.

We, as sinners, are like the lepers. In the past lepers were cut off from all human society. In a similar way, sin has cut us off from the divine life of God. Due to the sin of our first parents all humanity is separated from God, cut off from the spiritual health which God provides to the soul by its union with sanctifying grace.

But like the lepers in today's Gospel, we too place all our hope and trust in Our Redeemer's love and gratuitous mercy. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." By the sacrament of Baptism we are cleansed of the guilt of Original Sin; by the

sacrament of penance we are restored to divine life by the healing of our personal sins. Today, along with the Church, we pray in the holy liturgy, “Almighty God, increase in us the virtues of faith, hope and charity, so that we might merit what You have promised.” And all that God has promised is in view of the end that we might come to life eternal with Him.

Beloved, it is also true that we can not achieve eternal life except through our willing obedience to God’s commandments; except through our following His divine will in the full fabric of our daily lives. But this is only the bare minimum. Can that be enough?

Jesus said to the ten lepers, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” Through obedience to Him the ten went away and were cured. All of them. Yet among the ten, how many returned to thank Him for what had been done? One. Only one came back to express gratitude for the extraordinary miracle He had performed in behalf of them all.

Most beloved in Christ, how many times have we received the supernatural healing of sacramental absolution? And how many time have we received particular graces in answer to our prayer, our needs, our hopes? Indeed, we

need to also ask how often have we benefited from such acts of divine mercy without fully acknowledging their value or their divine origin?

It is true that we must do at least the minimum to be saved: pray, avoid sin, perform good works. But an authentic Christian life is not characterized by an attitude of doing what is absolutely the minimum. It is a rich life offered to us by God, even in the time of our sojourn here below. But such a life can only be developed with our willing cooperation.

In today's Gospel we are reminded of the necessity of thanking God for all the blessings we have received. Not only merely acknowledging our dependence on Him for our very life and salvation, but also recognizing before Him the healing and nourishment which He communicates so often to our souls: the forgiveness of our sins, an impossibility without the intervention of Jesus' life giving sacrifice on the cross, and that gift of grace by which our charity is increased and union with God is deepened.

When only one of the lepers returned to Jesus, Our Lord asked him, "Were there not ten of you who were cured?" All those ten had been cured just as all of us are cured: that is to say, cleansed and reborn by the sacraments of faith.

But only one of those lepers came back to thank Jesus, and it was to him alone that the Lord said, “Get up and go for your faith has healed you.” Jesus says the same to each one of us as well: many are pardoned, many are healed. But who will, in fact, be saved? This question needs the deepest consideration of each of us, daily, moment by moment . . . for is only those who return to God with humility and gratitude who will be saved. Those who lead lives truly ordered towards God with hearts’ submission characterized by an open recognition of His goodness and grace.

Let us, Beloved, each and every one, remember to give thanks to God – often and with fervor – for all His acts of love and healing. This is part of virtue’s duty, and the Christian life is ordered towards carrying out acts of virtue for our good and God’s glory. Let us make sure that we remain among those who live to the fullest the commandments of Christ’s faith, and not be found among those who deceive themselves by observing a “faith” correct in outward forms but devoid of spiritual depth and true Christian humility.

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. Increase our faith, hope and charity, that we may merit

the heavenly bliss which You have promised.” And to that cry we must add, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, help us to keep your Son’s commandments and to persevere in His obedience until the very moment our eyes are closed in death.” For in so doing, we may hope to come to the vision of God in the glory of His angels and saints, to be filled with a joy without measure – even unto the ages of ages.