

*Third Sunday after Epiphany: Learning from the Leper*  
January 27, 2019

“And when He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.” Mat 8:1

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew’s Gospel is the Sermon on the Mount, a sermon full of divine teaching for the wise. The sermon is given on a mountain, for the mountain is arduous to climb and only those who are strong can climb up it. The mountain can be seen as a figure for virtue, for only the virtuous can grasp the divine teaching. Those burdened by sin and worldly cares cannot climb this mountain nor understand the teachings of Christ.

Today’s Gospel passage begins with His coming down from the mountain and our Lord is approached by a leper, who could not climb the mountain. The bodily disease is a figure of the spiritual disease of the soul, namely sin. If we look to what the leper did to obtain a cure, we can see what we must do to cure the afflictions of the soul.

First, the leper comes to Christ. He is the divine physician who can cure us, but we must, with the help of His grace, approach Him and ask for help. God’s grace in fact inspires us to ask, for His grace always precedes our good actions. Second, the leper adores Christ. He recognizes that Christ is God and capable of saving him. Third, the leper says a humble prayer: “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean”. Our Savior knows what we need, but He also wants us to humble ourselves before Him and ask for the things we need. Fourth, the leper listens to our Lord’s instructions and does what our Lord tells him to do. He offers the gifts which were commanded in the Law.

If we consider the state of the leper, we have a graphic image of the unhappy state of sinners. Leprosy is an ugly disease that disfigures and slowly gnaws away at the person’s health and life. The lepers were driven from society because it is a contagious disease. We should keep this in mind, for if we indifferently hang out with sinners we will eventually follow them into sin. We must avoid sin by faithfulness to prayer and avoiding the occasion of sin; by considering the evil of sin in time and eternity, and most of all, considering Who is offended by our sin, i.e. God. Let us thank God for the wonderful gift of the sacrament of penance, for by this sacrament we can have the miraculous cure of our soul’s leprosy.

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