

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks...

And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.

Most of us like to be thanked, or we may be touched, humbled, encouraged, when we are thanked. In the Gospel today, we hear account of 10 lepers who are healed of physical sickness. The one who gives thanks gets something more: *Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.*

In this proclamation, the Living Word of God, the divine Son, our Lord Jesus, teaches us something profound about the principle of thanksgiving, about the connection between giving thanks and what St Paul calls walking in the Spirit.

The voice of thanksgiving is the grace of God which has reached out to us and changed us returning to its source. When we give thanks for the work of grace in our lives, our eyes are opened, yes, and more profoundly, we are drawn more deeply into the life of God the Holy Trinity. . Thanksgiving does not just happen, it is a choice, a choosing to see God's purposes. In some strange measure, God waits on our choosing Him.

The Gospel also helps us to see the connection between what we have been given, what Christ has done in us and for us, and what God the Holy Spirit is doing in us. God has saved us, we are being saved, we will be saved. This offers hope where we often face discouragement. Finally, our readings today help us to find God in messy complications of life, so that we can say with St Paul, that God's power is perfect in weakness

And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us

In New Testament times, Leprosy was a feared and awful disease¹. The ritual code of the Old Covenant treats leprosy as a form of living death. Contact with a leper was like contact with a corpse. The leper was forced to live apart from others. Leprosy is put forward in Scripture as a kind of picture of what sin does. This is shocking and unsettling. Whether or not it is apparent on the surface, when we turn away from God's good purposes for us, we in some way damage or deface his image in us.

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, **heresies**,*

¹ When Bible refers to leprosy, it probably includes skin conditions like psoriasis as well as more serious conditions which slowly destroyed the flesh.

envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. and such like, like real sheep, we are always looking for some new and creative way to hurt ourselves

When we choose these, and they all have variations—so to hold onto a grudge is to choose hatred, different forms of lust are forms of fornication or adultery, envy also has many faces, jealousy, resentment, and more; When we some way choose to disfigure ourselves, to damage what is most precious in us. But God does not leave us wounded, he does not leave us isolated, suffering and alone, without hope. He comes to seek us in Christ, and he comes back, and back again.

And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests.

It's important to see that this instruction, go show yourselves to the priests, must have seemed like a crazy or senseless instruction.

According to the law of Moses, the priest could pronounce a leper clean. However, the priest could not heal the leper. With regard to leprosy, the priest was not a doctor but a journalist or reporter. When Jesus told the lepers to go to show themselves to the priests, he required that they should act as if they were already cleansed.²

² The leper might say, why show myself to the priest, I am still sick, look I'm a leper, what can the priest do?

In Gospel today, Jesus doesn't just heal the lepers, he tells them to set out on a journey which only made sense if they were healed. Yet, when they set out, they were not yet healed, or, at least, they did not look like, did not seem like, they were healed. Simply put, he required that they set out in faith as if what was promised had already happened, or had indeed happened. The lepers had to believe that what Jesus promised would be given when the evidence suggested the contrary. They had to act as if they were being healed from inside out. *And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*

The journey of the 10 lepers is a metaphor of the journey which all Christians must make. *I SAY then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

Like the lepers, we are sent on a journey trusting that what has been promised has really been given. We read St Paul describe Christian life, saying that we are dead to sin. *And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

This is what Christ has done for us and in us. St Paul's words here , and the witness of the whole of the Scriptures, are given expression in the service of baptism.

We pray that the old Adam will be buried in the person baptized, that the new man, the new Adam, Jesus Christ, will be raised up in her or in him. We pray that all carnal affections may die in the one to be baptized. We pray that the person who will be made a member of the body of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven will have power and strength to have victory against the devil, the world, and the flesh. We pray that the child of God may be endued with heavenly virtues, with the reality and gifts of the Spirit.

And before we pray these prayers at the office of baptism, we are assured ‘which things Christ, for his part, will most surely perform’.

Christ, with the Holy Spirit and the Father, saves us, God HT is saving us, God will save us. Sometimes in the Church we describe these different moments by speaking of the work of Justification and the work of Sanctification. We are already members of the mystical body of Christ, we are assured of our Saviour’s favour and goodness toward us, we are heirs through hope of God’s everlasting kingdom. All of this has been accomplished for us in God coming to us in Christ, in his saving teaching and in his death, resurrection, and Ascension, what we hear each week described as ‘the merits of the most precious death and passion of God’s dear Son’. All this has been done, and we have received it in faith. With the 10 lepers, we set out toward the goal, toward the heavenly city of restored human community, toward *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance* toward them even as we grasp and hold them however fleetingly, or experience them,

toward the final consummation when with all the saints, at the general resurrection in the last day, we may be found acceptable in God's sight, and hear the words of the divine Son, 'Come ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.' We set out with the lepers, trusting that all this has been given. We are justified, made right with God, by the work of Christ, by our sharing in his life.

And yet we don't seem to be dead to sin. Sometimes we seem to be the victims of sin and other times we chose it. On the one hand, the words of Christ promise that we have been freed from consequences of sin, that we are forgiven and restored. On the other hand, we still feel the consequences of spiritual leprosy, we struggle with others and with ourselves, we know that we contribute to some of the problems which mess up our lives, we know that we are not living fully as we are called to live. The great promises and hopes seem to elude us. How are we to make sense of it? The promises of the Scriptures can seem so different from experience.

We are made whole, justified, made right with God, by the work of Christ, by our sharing in his life, by the, wonderful as it is to say, by the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And, at the same time, we pray that what has been given will be worked out in us. That we who are justified may also be sanctified. That what is given to us as Christ's may become more fully ours. We have been saved, justified, we are being saved, we are being

made holy, sanctified, we will be saved, we will receive glorifying grace, our perfect consummation and bliss when Christ will be all in all.

The Gospel today helps to guard us from a form of despair, from despair about the work of grace in our own lives. If we need to come back day after day, week after week, making the same confession, acknowledging the same weakness, aware of the same forms of blindness, does this mean that the Holy Spirit is not at work in our lives? Does this mean that walking in the Spirit is a kind of blind denial of real life, we are simply keep our eyes closed to whatever contradicts the promise? Not at all. Week by week, day by day, we acknowledge our weaknesses and our failures even as we give thank for new life and renewal. However, we are called not to become too preoccupied with ourselves, or to look only at the negative.

We are called to consider our weaknesses, failures, and need as much smaller things than the grace of God. It is a kind of pride and blindness to imagine that God's grace is not enough for our need. God is not overwhelmed by either our sins or our needs. We are called to trust in Christ's promises to us, to make our journey as we have been directed and guided by the voice of Christ and the voice of the Church, trusting that we will be cleansed on the way, that he will bring to perfection the good work which he has begun in us.

We reach out in faith toward what we are promised, even as we how much of that promise is yet to be fully accomplished.

Ok, well perhaps I should stop here, but perhaps it would be better to say three things briefly about what we may learn for our current circumstances and pilgrimage in faith by considering the wonderful account of Naaman's washing in the river Jordan alongside the thanksgiving of the Samaritan.

Naaman is brought to accept that God can use weak signs, in his case a river which he despised, to do great things. The office and the sacraments of the Church can seem like weak things, so ordinary, so normal. How can such great promises, participation in the life of God, beyond all understanding and imagining, be attached to such small and ordinary things. That is how God has worked from the beginning of creation. Naaman with the prophet Elisha is our teacher.

Naaman is not just healed, he is made whole by returning to give thanks. 10 lepers were cleansed, one is made whole, the one who returns to give thanks. The sacraments and office of the church are means of grace, every act of prayer is a work of the Spirit in us. And yet none of things can be reduced to mechanics, to certain forms of words, and certain things being done. The being made whole comes along with an inward transformation, with a lively response of faith. God does not just act upon us, he seeks our love, to act with us, and our thanks is our choosing what God choses for us.

When we give thanks with the leper, we are caught up into the life of God. The voice of thanksgiving is the grace of God which has reached out to us, it is the grace which has changed us, and it the God's Spirit in us returning to its source, to the Father , with the Son. When we give thanks for the work of grace in our lives, our eyes are opened and we are drawn more and more into the life of God the Holy Trinity.³

Finally, I have described already how our own struggle with weakness and foolishness can be a source of discouragement. This is also true in our lives as members of the body of Christ. How we live together as members of the body of Christ can be a source of great discouragement. Many have been dismayed by confusions and arguments in the C of E in recent years or decades, or the C of E's response to the pandemic. Such struggles have always been part of the life of the Church, and it is the difficult challenge of each generation to try to make sense of them. The horrible scandal of abuse which has touched different parts of the Church in different degrees has driven many of God's children to despair, and that, brothers and sisters, is a thing too terrible to contemplate. For some, this has led to the decision that it is no longer right or good to remain in this portion of Christ's vineyard. In the last year a number of colleagues and brothers and sisters in Christ have decided that they cannot remain in communion with the C of E. Even as we pray

³ The leper's thanks, our thanks, is the key which opens the door to joy. The voice of praise and thanksgiving is the overflowing of the Spirit in our lives. This thanksgiving is part of what accomplishes the very thing for which we give thanks. In the leper's thanks we see how faith and hope is fulfilled in love. We cannot manufacture this joy, but we can exert ourselves to give thanks and leave the rest to God.

for unity, and for the day that all shall be one, these divisions are sources of pain to us. this is not a time for me after a sermon which has gone on too long already, to offer an ecclesiology which makes sense of our current trials and divisions. [[It may be that those who have decided that they cannot remain in the C of E are showing us the way to follow. I do not believe this, and do not believe that this is the way to the full unity and communion which our Lord desires for us. The church will often manifest God's grace in power not only in weakness, but through weakness and confusion. The Church will bear the form of a cross. That is not meant to offer an apology for the weakness and foolishness which expresses our sins or blindness. However, thanks be to God, Christ saves us despite our sins and foolishness. I will leave you with the words of Dr Pusey who, in the midst of struggles in the Church in his day, and in sadness at the departure of his good friend, dear Mr Newman, both longed for the full communion which Christ wills for us, but also found the anchor of his faith in the work of Christ. In Pusey's words:

You too have felt that it is what is unholy on both sides which keeps us apart...As each, by God's grace, *grows in holiness*, each Church will recognize, more and more, the Presence of God's Holy Spirit in the other; and what now hinders the union of the Western Church will fall off...But while we go on humbled, and the humbler, surely neither need we be dejected. God's chastisements are in mercy too.

You, too, will have seen, within these last ...⁴ years, God's work with the souls in our Church ...⁵

[God] has not forsaken us, Who, in fruits of holiness, in supernatural workings of His grace, *in* deepening devotion, in the awakening of consciences ...⁶ shows Himself more than ever present with us...⁷ It is not to immediate results that we ought to look, 'the times are in His hands'; but this one cannot doubt, that the good hand of God ...⁸ is with us still ...⁹ Gifts of grace are His Own Blessed Presence ... And so, amid whatever mysterious dispensation of His Providence, we may safely commit ourselves and our work, in good hope, to Him Who hath loved us hitherto. He Who loved us amid negligence so as to give us the earnest desire to please Him, will surely not forsake us now He has given us that desire, and we, amid whatever infirmities individually, or remaining defects as a body, do still more earnestly desire His glory¹⁰

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

⁴ few

⁵ For myself, I am even now far more hopeful as to our Church than at any former period—far more, than when outwardly things seemed most prosperous. It would seem as if God, in His mercy, let us now see more of His inward workings, in order that in the tokens of His Presence with us, we may take courage.

⁶ in His own manifest acknowledgement of the 'power of the keys' as vested in our Church,

⁷ These are not simply individual workings. They are too widespread, too manifold.

⁸ which has been over us in the manifold trials of the last three centuries, checking, withholding, guiding, chastening, leading, and now so wonderfully extending us

⁹ It is not thus He ever purposes to leave a Church.

¹⁰ Liddon, *Life of E. B. Pusey*, vol ii, pp 460-63.