

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 17:11-19

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Faith proves to the mind, the reality of things that cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh. Faith speaks to our gracious God, *“I am a poor miserable sinner. I do not deserve Your compassion or Your mercy. I have lived as though Your will did not matter all that much in my life. In fact, I have lived as if I mattered most, as though my desires were supreme. I have soiled myself with sin. I have not loved You above all things, nor have I loved my neighbor nearly as much as I love myself. I justly deserve Your temporal and eternal punishment.”*

Yet, faith does not stop there, for if that were entirety of our faith, we would still be damned, dead in our sins, lost and condemned creatures for the rest of eternity. No, faith does not stop there, but lifts up its voice crying out, *“JESUS, Master, have mercy on [me]!”*

Thus, true faith cries out with assurance and a firm conviction that JESUS hears our cries for mercy, that our plea for mercy does not fall on deaf ears, but on a divine Heart full of the love and compassion of our God. Such confession is repentance, born of, and the very substance of, faith, for to repent means to turn to God with a contrite heart, seeking His forgiveness with a sure and certain knowledge—with the conviction—that God hears our prayers and forgives us all our sins. Faith confesses, *“Yes LORD, I am unworthy of Your grace and Your love. I am unworthy of Your mercy, but only say the Word and I shall be healed.”*

But what the ten lepers of our Gospel account saw manifested in their flesh cried out against such faith. How could a just and loving God allow such a thing to be? How could He let such a disease take hold of their flesh, a disease that promised a long, miserable, painful, and lonely death? That is what their diseased and rotting flesh cried out.

You see, the condition of their flesh warred against faith in a merciful, compassionate God; a God who hears prayers and answers them; a God who loves and cares for His children. But, *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* Faith proves to the heart and mind, the reality of things that cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh.

Faith holds on to God and His promises no matter what the circumstances. It clings to CHRIST JESUS in good times and bad, in sickness and in health. Faith clings to God, forsaking all others, and looking to Him alone to supply for all our needs in this life and in the life to come.

Faith trusts in God. Faith trusts in God in this world of terror and war. Faith trusts in God when the earth trembles and when the seas roar and rage. Faith trusts in God when you

lose your job, your spouse, your children. Faith trusts in God when pain and suffering are all you can see or feel, when it seems as though you are drowning in a sea of misery and despair. Faith holds tightly to God when you mourn, when you are afraid, or when your world comes crashing down around you. Faith is your anchor when your doctor says, *“I am sorry, but it is cancer,”* or *“I am sorry, but there is nothing more that can be done for you.”* Faith looks to the crucified and risen SON of God, JESUS CHRIST, as the only remedy for everything gone wrong and perverted in this life. Faith looks to JESUS CHRIST who saw your need, and in His compassion accomplished everything that was required to save you.

It is this same faith that made the ten lepers clean. Lepers were outcasts. According to the Law of God their disease made them unclean and separated them from family and loved ones. Worse, it separated them from God because they were not allowed to enter the Temple or a synagogue to worship or make sacrifice for their sins—and remember, for a Jew there is no forgiveness without the shedding of innocent blood.

These ten lepers came to the village that day hoping to be made well. They pleaded with CHRIST to have mercy on them. They stood at a distance and implored JESUS to give them back their lives, to restore them to their families and friends, to restore them to their communities by restoring their flesh. And that is what He did. As they ran to the temple priests to be pronounced clean, they discovered that they had been made whole; that the vile disease of leprosy had been cured.

They went at JESUS’ Word, believing in its power to cure all manner of illness. They went even before they saw any physical change in their condition. They heard the Word of JESUS and believed.

Of the ten men, nine ran to the priests to be declared clean and it was so. They were made clean, and yet, only one was made well; only one was saved. Only one returned to the Great High Priest and worshipped Him; only one returned to the One who restored him, body and soul, and he was a Samaritan.

It was only the Samaritan who recognized the true wonder in his healing. Only the Samaritan recognized God in the flesh. Only the Samaritan recognized JESUS to be the object of his faith. And so he returned to the Source of his healing, to the One he recognized as the only source of true mercy, and falling on his face before JESUS, he worshipped Him. The ten came to JESUS seeking merciful healing, and this is what they received because God pours out His mercy on both the evil and the good, but the Samaritan received something much more; he received saving faith and this saving faith saved him.

Therefore, we learn something more about faith. Faith receives. Martin Luther tells us that faith receives and love gives. That is, saving faith receives the love that is God, and in receiving, is saved. That is the way it is with our merciful FATHER in heaven. He is always more willing to give than we are to receive.

But faith perceives this, for faith is of God and is never satisfied but hungers for the knowledge and presence of God. Faith receives the mercy of God and hungers for more. It desires and prays for the One thing needful, the One thing that can fill it until its *“cup runneth over.”*

Faith desires the One thing that heals, not just our physical infirmities and sicknesses, but the spiritual leprosy of our sin; a leprosy that cuts us off from God and salvation. Faith wants what only God can give: new and eternal life, rest, love, hope, and true peace; faith desires the righteousness of CHRIST for the forgiveness of our sins.

So here we are now, back at the beginning, *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* Faith proves to the mind, the reality of things that cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh. Faith cries out to the only One who can save us. Faith cries out, *“JESUS, Master, have mercy on [me]!”* **knowing** that He **will** hear, and hearing, grant us mercy.

For this has been accomplished for us already in His all-sufficient sacrifice—His innocent suffering and death on the Cross. Faith returns to the SAVIOR, not to give, not to bestow gifts, but to be fed over and over again; faith returns to the SAVIOR to receive.

Faith holds firmly to the One who died to set you free, who suffered that you would not. Faith responds to that sacrifice with worship and hymns of praise. Faith acknowledges that true worship can only be found in God’s House because the Church is where God is located in the Flesh at the point of JESUS’ Flesh and Blood.

And so, like the Samaritan, we are gathered here in this holy house in the presence of our LORD for the purpose of receiving His mercy. We respond by glorifying and honoring JESUS for His goodness toward us. We genuflect at JESUS’ feet. In point of fact, we bow at JESUS’ feet when we kneel at His altar, the place where He is concretely and bodily present for us.

Here at this chancel rail we come praying *“LORD, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but only speak the Word and my soul shall be healed.”* We come praying *“LORD, have mercy upon us, CHRIST, have mercy upon us, LORD, have mercy upon us!”* We come to the feet of the Source of all mercy, to acknowledge and confess Him as the Giver of every blessing. We give thanks to the LORD as He feeds us with the fruits of His sacrifice in His true Body and Blood, which cleanse us and bring us new life. JESUS is truly here as your High Priest to fill you with His mercy through His Words and His Holy Supper. He is truly here to bring health to your flesh and the resurrection of your body with His Medicine of Immortality.

So come and fall on your knees before your LORD and SAVIOR. He has heard your cry, *“JESUS, Master have mercy on [me].”* Here, He stands not afar off, but so near that you can touch Him. Here, He gives to you that peace which only He can give—a peace to calm your fears, heal your hurts, dry your tears, and restore your soul. JESUS hears your cry for mercy and answers you with His sweet Words of life in His blessed absolution, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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