

LEPERS, SAMARITANS AND GRATITUDE

January 20, 2019
12th Sunday of Luke

Revision E

Gospel: Luke 17:12-19

In the Western Church in the United States, today's Gospel lesson is used for the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving Day. The Eastern Church does not celebrate Thanksgiving Day as a Feast Day. The Gospel lesson is the account of the ten lepers that were healed by Jesus; where one was a Samaritan. To get a better understanding of the circumstances, let us look at the Mosaic Law regarding leprosy and at the history of the Samaritan people up to the first century.

Background

Leprosy, According to Mosaic Law

Diagnosis:

The priest was given the task of diagnosing whether an infection was leprosy or benign (Leviticus 13:1-3). In addition, the priest also diagnosed leprosy arising from boils on the skin and from skin burns, whether it occurs on bare skin or in a person's hair (Leviticus 13:4-46). Clothing also was brought to the priest for inspection and diagnosis; if the clothing had leprosy that was spreading, the clothing had to be burned (Leviticus 13:47-59).

The Life of a Leper:

Lepers were required to live alone or separated from society, outside the camp. His (or her) clothing was to be torn (as in a state of mourning); he had to keep his head uncovered and his mustache covered. Whenever non-lepers came along, the leper was required to say, "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn the non-lepers to stay away (Leviticus 13:45-46).

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Purification of a Leper:

When a leper was cleansed or healed, he needed to show himself to a priest for verification. The priest then met the leper outside the camp and checked him over (Leviticus 14:1-3). If the leper was indeed healed, a series of offerings were performed involving two live birds. One bird was killed over running water and the other bird was dipped in the bloody water and then released. The leper was sprinkled seven times with the bloody water (Leviticus 14:4-8).

Following this, the leper was shaved of all body hair, including his eyebrows, and then, bathed. Eight days later, he was required to offer another offering involving three lambs (two

males, one ewe) plus flour and oil. Only after all this could the leper return to normal society (Leviticus 14:9-32).

Who Were the Samaritans?

Samaria was part of the Northern Kingdom that was led into captivity by the Assyrians in the 8th Century BC. The ten tribes representing the Northern Kingdom had been given to Jeroboam, Solomon's servant, because of idolatry in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:26-36). Jeroboam,

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in turn, made two golden calves saying that these were the ones that brought Israel out of Egypt (1 Kings 12:26-29). Archaeological research suggests that these golden calves were intended as supports for the invisible Presence of the Lord. Baal, for example, was commonly portrayed in 8th to 10th Century BC iconography as enthroned on the back of a bull or other animal.

The Samaritan people initially were Jews of the ten tribes, but the Assyrian conquerors sent bands of people from other nations into that area in the 7th and 8th Centuries BC to make up for Jews taken away captive. As the people of that area intermarried, the Samaritans came to be racially mixed. However, the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses representing the Law) was well known in Samaria. Jeroboam tried to copy the worship in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:32) in at least some aspects. People in the Northern Kingdom were familiar with the Ark of the Covenant due to its resting place at Shiloh (located within the borders of the Northern Kingdom) prior to Solomon's Temple.

By the time of Ezra (c. 520 BC), the residents of Samaria were referred to as the enemies of the reconstruction (Ezra 4:1-2). The Samaritans claimed to be seeking the same God as the Southern Kingdom, but Zerubbabel and Ezra didn't buy it.

In about 409 BC, Manasseh, the brother of Jaddua the high priest, was expelled from the Southern Kingdom by Nehemiah for an unlawful marriage to a foreign woman. Manasseh's wealthy father-in-law, Sanballat, obtained permission from Darius, the last Persian king, to build a temple on Mt. Gerizim very much like the temple in Jerusalem. Sanballat then set his son-in-law, Manasseh, up as high priest on Mt. Gerizim and persuaded other priests in Jerusalem with foreign wives to join him¹. [Leviticus 21 required the high priest to avoid foreign wives, but not specifically the other priests. In Ezra 10:9-19 this injunction was extended to all the priests].

Thus, the Samaritans imitated the worship in Jerusalem. When persecution came, however, the worship of Mt. Gerizim changed. For example, in about 167 BC, Antiochus captured Jerusalem, pillaged the Temple and offered swine on the altar. Judas Maccabaeus then led a revolt to drive out Antiochus and purify the Temple. Before the Maccabee revolt, the Samaritans sent envoys to Antiochus (a Greek) offering to change the name of their Temple to the Temple of Jupiter and claiming that they were Persians, not Jews (thus hoping Antiochus would not pillage their Temple also). This merely added to the disgust the Jews in Jerusalem had for the worship on Mt. Gerizim².

¹ For more details, see Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book xi.

² For more details, see Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, xii, 5.

By 125 BC, Josephus stated³ that the Temple on Mt. Gerizim had fallen into disuse and was deserted. Shortly thereafter, Hyrcanus came through with his army and demolished Samaria and the Temple on Mt. Gerizim.

Later during the time of the Maccabees (167 to 63 BC), the Temple on Mt. Gerizim was rebuilt. Since the Maccabees controlled Samaria during this time, the Samaritans developed a zealous devotion to the Jewish Law. During the reign of Herod I, Samaria was refortified as a city and a great Temple was constructed within the city walls. Mt. Gerizim, five miles to the Southeast of Samaria, continued to be considered a sacred place⁴.

Mt. Gerizim and the adjacent peak of Mt Ebal were both about 2500 ft. high and located in the center of Israel. Together they formed a part of an unusual liturgy performed by Joshua at the time of the Conquest (Deuteronomy 27:12-25, Joshua 8:30-35).

On Mt. Ebal the Law was painted on stone as an icon and as a curse for those who refuse to keep it (Deuteronomy 27:2-4). Cyprian stated⁵ that the stones on which the Law was written represent Christ, the Lawgiver. As references he cited, “Thus says the Lord, Behold, I place on the foundations of Zion a precious stone, elect, chief, a corner stone, honorable; and he who trusts in Him shall not be confounded” (Isaiah 28:16). “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. This is done by the Lord, and it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day, which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord, save therefore, O Lord, direct therefore. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 118:22-25).

The blessings and the curses were given very dramatic prominence following the Conquest and in a liturgical fashion (Deuteronomy 27:12-26). Since “those who are of faith are blessed with the believing Abraham” (Galatians 3:9), the blessing on Mt. Gerizim represents the blessing Abraham received for loving God and neighbor (Genesis 15:6). Mt. Gerizim continued to stand for holiness to the Samaritans. Photini, the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, a town which was at the foot of Mt. Gerizim (John 4:7-9), considered Mt. Gerizim more proper than Jerusalem (John 4: 19-24). On the other hand, “the Law is not made for a righteous person” (1 Timothy 1:9), and “as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse” (Galatians 3:10, Deuteronomy 27:26). In His answer to Photini regarding Mt. Gerizim, Jesus spoke of true worship in spirit and truth – elsewhere.

The curse on Mt. Ebal represents what those who refuse to love God and neighbor can expect to receive after being reminded by the Law their entire life about what God expects, and yet refusing to obey. Just to show the love of God for His people, Christ Himself became the curse that was proclaimed on Mt. Ebal in becoming sin and taking away the sin of the world (Galatians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Tertullian referred⁶ to the blessing and the curse as good and evil. “Behold”, says the Lord, “I have set before you good and evil. Choose that which is good. If you cannot because you will not (for that you can if you will He has shown, because He

³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xiii, 9:1, 10:1-2

⁴ See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xiii, 15:4; xiv, 5:3; xv, 8:5. Also Merrill F. Unger, *Ungers Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 960.

⁵ Cyprian, *Treatises* XII, iii, 16.

⁶ Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, xiv.

has proposed each to your free-will) then you ought to depart from Him whose will you do not do”.

Jesus had several other contacts with Samaritans during His three-year public ministry. For example, James and John, the sons of thunder as Jesus called them, (Mark 3:17) proposed calling down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that did not receive them (Luke 9:51-56) just as Elijah did. That Jesus was in Samaria at all is noteworthy, since Jews usually traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem via the East side of the Jordan so they could avoid all contact with Samaritans.

Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus healed ten lepers at the same time. He told them to go show themselves to the priests, which was what the Mosaic Law required for them to be declared clean and free from leprosy. Then they were healed of their leprosy on the way to show themselves to the priests. Only one leper, a Samaritan, turned back to thank Jesus for healing him of this incurable disease.

Jesus healed the ten lepers in early 30 AD, as He was heading to Jerusalem to be crucified. Three years earlier, He healed a single leper right after He gave the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 8:1-4).

Per Jesus' custom, he did not go from Galilee to Jerusalem by crossing over to the East side of the Jordan as most Jews did, but went right through Samaria. In one village there were ten lepers, and one was a Samaritan. Perhaps their quarantine and mutual misery drew them together.

Where was this village located, Galilee, Samaria, or Judea? The text doesn't say. Since Jesus referred to the Samaritan as a foreigner or stranger (Luke 17:18), the implication is that the village was in Galilee, perhaps near the border with Samaria. Cyril of Alexandria interprets⁷ it this way also.

The lepers seemed to know who Jesus was, yet they kept their distance in obedience to the Mosaic Law. The text doesn't mention them crying out "Unclean! Unclean!" as required by the Mosaic Law, but they probably did this at first. As we do often in the Liturgy, they cried out, "Have mercy on us!" the first thing Jesus said was, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they went to show themselves to the priests, they were healed. Given that Samaritans were despised by Jews, we can only wonder whether the Samaritan leper could find a priest that would even stoop to look at his condition, never mind perform all the sacrifices required by the Mosaic Law. The Samaritan, perhaps realizing this and knowing that it was a Jew who healed him, returned and glorified God with a *LOUD VOICE*, falling down at Jesus' feet.

When Jesus sent all ten lepers to show themselves to the priests, they still had the leprosy. Since they were cleansed on the way, Jesus expected (and common courtesy would also dictate)

⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 17, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 466.

that they should return to express their gratitude before going through the eight-day purification required by the Mosaic Law.

Tertullian of Carthage stated⁸ that the Law about lepers had a profound meaning where Christ simply commanded the lepers to show themselves to the priest. No part of this healing was affected in a way different from the Law. His main purpose was to strike at the unbelief of Israel, in that there were many lepers among them. Yet for many hundred years not one had been moved even by so conspicuous an example to call on God who was working in His prophets. Christ Himself inspected them according to the hidden intention of the Law; they were cleansed because they were obedient, and went as the Law required. They recognized the truth that at Jerusalem the Law was to be fulfilled; but Christ was astonished that only one out of the ten was thankful for his release to the divine grace. The Samaritan leper had discovered that it was his duty to render the true oblation to Almighty God — even thanksgiving — in His true temple, and before His true High Priest *Jesus* Christ.

“The Law about lepers had a profound meaning regarding the forms of the disease itself, and of the inspection by the high priest (Leviticus 13-14). The interpretation of this sense it will be our task to ascertain. Christ simply commanded the lepers to show themselves to the priest; ‘and as they went, He cleansed them’ (Luke 17:14) — without a touch, without a word, by His silent power and simple will. Christ had been once for all announced as the healer of our sicknesses and sins, and had proved Himself such by His acts. Why did He need to busy Himself with inquiries into the qualities *and details* of cures; why did the Creator need to be summoned to the scrutiny of the Law in the person of Christ? No part of this healing was affected by Him in a way different from the Law, He Himself did it to perfection. Surely the Lord may by Himself, or by His Son, produce after any manner by His servants the prophets, those proofs of His power and might. He said in a preceding chapter, that ‘Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.’ (Luke 4:27). The mere number proves nothing tending to the abasement of the Creator in curing only one leper. Who can doubt that many might have been cured by Him who cured one (Matthew 8:1-4) and then ten (Luke 17:12-19)? His main purpose in this declaration was to strike at the unbelief or the pride of Israel, in that there were many lepers among them, and a prophet was not lacking to them for many centuries. Yet not one had been moved even by so conspicuous an example to take himself to God who was working in His prophets. He was Himself the High Priest of God the Father; He inspected them according to the hidden intention of the Law, which signified that Christ was the true distinguisher and extinguisher of the defilements of mankind. However, what was obviously required by the Law He commanded should be done: ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests’ (Luke 17:14). Yet why this, if He meant to cleanse them first? The interpretation to be found of the passage is that they were cleansed on this account, because they were obedient, and went as the Law required, when they were commanded to go to the priests. Why, however, did He not give such a command to the leper who first returned? Because Elisha did not

⁸ Tertullian, Five Books against Marcion, II, iv, 35.

do so in the case of Naaman the Syrian; and he was no less the Creator's agent! This is a sufficient answer. But the believer knows that there is a profounder reason. Consider: therefore, the true motives. The miracle was performed in the district of Samaria, to which country also belonged one of the lepers (Luke 17:16). Samaria, however, had revolted from Israel, carrying with it the disaffected ten tribes, which, having been alienated by the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29-39; 12:15), Jeroboam settled in Samaria. Besides, the Samaritans were always pleased with the mountains and the wells of their ancestors. Thus, in the Gospel of John, the woman of Samaria, when conversing with the Lord at the well, says, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet' (John 4:19), and again, 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; but you Jews say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship' (John 4:20). Accordingly, He who said, 'Woe to them that set Zion at naught, and that trust in the mountain of Samaria' (Amos 6:1 LXX), granting now to restore that region, purposely requests the men 'to go and show themselves to the priests'. These priests were to be found only there where the temple was; submitting the Samaritan to the Jew, inasmuch as 'salvation was of the Jews' (John 4:22). To the tribe of Judah, indeed, wholly appertained the promised Christ, in order that men might know that at Jerusalem were both the priests and the temple. There also was the womb of religion, and its *living* fountain, not its *mere* 'well'. Seeing, therefore, that they recognized the truth that at Jerusalem the Law was to be fulfilled, He healed them, whose salvation was to come of faith (Luke 17:19) not needing the ceremony of the Law. Christ was astonished that only one out of the ten was thankful for his release to the divine grace, He does not command the former leper to offer a gift according to the Law. He had already paid his tribute of gratitude when 'with a loud voice he glorified God' (Luke 17:15); for thus did the Lord will that the Law's requirement should be interpreted. Therefore, it was said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well' (Luke 17:19). He had discovered that it was his duty to render the true oblation to Almighty God — even thanksgiving — in His true temple, and before His true High Priest *Jesus* Christ. 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:20-21). Now, who will not interpret the words '*within you*' to mean *in your hand, within your power*, if you hear, and do the commandment of God? If, however, the kingdom of God lies in His commandment, set before your mind Moses on the other side, according to our *antitheses*, and you will find the selfsame view of the case. 'For this commandment which I command you today *is not too* mysterious for you, nor *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it' (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). This means, 'Neither in this place nor that place is the kingdom of God; for, behold, it is within you''.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹ that the Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus early in His public ministry of being a Samaritan who has a demon (John 8:48). Therefore, Jesus used Samaritans in some of His parables and miracles as examples of the one who did good, such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), and one of the ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹⁰ that Christ loved the one as thankful, but was angry with the others as ungrateful. They thought more of the cure of the leprosy than of Him who healed them. The result was that there was more given to the Samaritan leper than to the rest. Similarly, Paul exhorts all men to this.

“So now, those who keep the Passover like the Jews, the Lord again reproves, as He did those lepers who were cleansed. He loved the one as thankful, but was angry with the others as ungrateful, because they did not acknowledge their Deliverer; they thought more of the cure of the leprosy than of Him who healed them. ‘And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. ‘Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?”’ (Luke 17:15-18). There was more given to him than to the rest; for being cleansed from his leprosy, he heard from the Lord, ‘Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well’ (Luke 17:19). For he who gives thanks, and he who glorifies, have kindred feelings, in that they bless their Helper for the benefits they have received. Paul exhorts all men to this, saying, ‘therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s’ (1 Corinthians 6:20); and the prophet commands, saying, ‘Give glory to God’ (Jeremiah 13:13). Testimony was borne by Caiaphas (Matthew 26:65) against our Redeemer, and He was set at naught by the Jews, and was condemned by Pilate in those days. Yet exalted exceedingly and most mighty was the voice of the Father which came to Him; ‘Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify *it* again”’ (John 12:28). For those things which He suffered for our sake have passed away; but those which belong to Him as the Savior remain forever.”

John Cassian described¹¹ the insight of Abbot Paphnutius regarding the free gift of God that brought Israel into the land of promise. It belongs to divine grace to give us opportunities for salvation, prosperous undertakings and victory; but that it is ours to follow up the blessings which God gives us with earnestness. After the reception of any blessing, the grace of God, and the use of free-will both remain, the case of the ten lepers, who were all healed, shows us. When one of them returned thanks, the Lord praised the one, and showed that He was anxious to help even those who were unmindful of His kindness

“The free gift of God is clearly and plainly described in Deuteronomy.

‘When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you: the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXI, 2.

¹⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, VI, 3.

¹¹ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Paphnutius, I, iii, 19.

and mightier than you. When the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them' (Deuteronomy 7:1-3). So, then Scripture declares that it is the free gift of God that they are brought into the land of promise, that many nations are destroyed before them, that nations more numerous and mightier than the people of Israel are given up into their hands. But whether Israel utterly destroys them, or whether it preserves them alive and spares them, and whether or not it makes a covenant with them, and makes marriages with them or not, it declares lies in their own power. By this testimony we can clearly see what we ought to ascribe to free will, and what to the design and daily assistance of the Lord. It belongs to divine grace to give us opportunities for salvation, prosperous undertakings and victory; but that it is ours to follow up the blessings which God gives us with earnestness or indifference. This same fact we see is plainly taught in the healing of the blind men. For the fact that Jesus passed by them, was a free gift of Divine providence and condescension. But the fact that they cried out was an act of their own faith and belief. 'Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!"' (Matthew 20:31). That they received the sight of their eyes was a gift of Divine pity. But that after the reception of any blessing, the grace of God, and the use of free will both remain, the case of the ten lepers, who were all healed, shows us. For when one of them through goodness of will returned thanks, the Lord looking for the nine, and praising the one, showed that He was ever anxious to help even those who were unmindful of His kindness. For even this is a gift of His visitation; that he receives and commends the grateful one, and looks for and censures those who are thankless."

Athanasius of Alexandria stated¹² that we are encouraged to not quench the Spirit, even though bad and unthankful men persecute the Spirit with unholy deeds. They being without understanding, walk still as in darkness. Jesus Christ, being good and a lover of men, came that He might cast this fire on earth; Paul also, when seized by this fire, revealed it not to flesh and blood. But not such were those nine lepers, who were unthankful to the Lord who healed them. Such men will receive the due reward of their folly.

"Paul, when desirous that the grace of the Spirit given to us should not grow cold, exhorts, saying, 'Do not quench the Spirit' (1 Thessalonians 5:19). For so shall we remain partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to the end the Spirit given at the beginning. Paul didn't say, 'Do not quench;' because the Spirit is placed in the power of men, and is able to allow anything from them. But because bad and unthankful men are such as manifestly wish to quench it, since they, like the impure, persecute the Spirit with unholy deeds. 'For a holy spirit of discipline flees from deceit; and sends away undiscerning reasoning (Wisdom 1:5 LXX). Now they being without understanding, deceitful, and lovers of sin, walk still as in darkness, not having, 'That which was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world' (John 1:9). Now a fire such as this laid hold of

¹² Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, III, 4.

Jeremiah the prophet, 'But *His word* was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding *it* back, and I could not' (Jeremiah 20:9). And our Lord Jesus Christ, being good and a lover of men, came that He might cast this fire on earth, and said, 'I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!' (Luke 12:49). He desired, as He testified in Ezekiel, 'For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore, turn and live!' (Ezekiel 18:32). So that evil should be entirely consumed in all men, that the soul, being purified, might be able to bring forth fruit; for the word which is sown by Him will be productive, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold (Mark 4:20). Thus, for instance, those who were with Cleopas (Luke 24), although infirm at first from lack of knowledge, yet afterwards were inflamed with the words of the Savior, and brought forth the fruits of the knowledge of Him. Paul also, when seized by this fire, revealed it not to flesh and blood, but having experienced the grace, he became a preacher of the Word. But not such were those nine lepers who were cleansed from their leprosy, and yet were unthankful to the Lord who healed them. Nor Judas, who obtained the lot of an apostle, and was named a disciple of the Lord, but at last, 'while eating bread with the Savior, lifted up his heel against Him, and became a traitor' (Psalm 41:9, John 13:18). But such men have the due reward of their folly, since their expectation will be vain through their ingratitude. For there is no hope for the ungrateful; the last fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, awaits those who have neglected divine light. Such then is the end of the unthankful."

Gregory the Theologian stated¹³ that we were full of leprosy; we should not associate with the nine unthankful men. We do not want to break out again with evil ulcers. By our cleansing we have become an object of enmity to the Evil One. While rejoicing and being lifted up above measure by the blessing, we may fall again through pride.

"You were full of leprosy, that shapeless evil, yet you scraped off the evil matter, and received again the Image whole. Show your cleansing to me your Priest, that I may recognize how much more precious it is than the legal one. Do not range yourself with the nine unthankful men, but imitate the tenth (Luke 17:12-19). For although he was a Samaritan, yet he was of better mind than the others. Make certain that you will not break out again with evil ulcers, and find the indisposition of your body hard to heal. Yesterday meanness and avarice were withering your hand; today let liberality and kindness stretch it out (Luke 6:6-10). It is a noble cure for a weak hand to disperse abroad, to give to the poor (Psalm 112:9), to pour out the things which we possess abundantly, till we reach the very bottom. Perhaps this will gush forth food for you, as for the woman of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-14). Especially if you happen to be feeding an Elijah, to recognize that it is a good abundance to be needy for the sake of Christ, Who for our sakes became poor. If you were deaf and dumb, let the Word sound (Mark 7:32-35) in your ears, or rather keep Him there, Who hath sounded. Do not shut your ears to the Instruction of the Lord, and to His Counsel, like the deaf cobra to charms (Psalm 58:4-5 LXX). If you are blind and unenlightened, lighten your eyes lest

¹³ Gregory the Theologian, Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 34.

you sleep the *sleep of death* (Psalm 13:3 LXX). In God's Light see light (Psalm 36:9 LXX), and in the Spirit of God be enlightened by the Son, That Threefold and Undivided Light. If you receive all the Word, you will bring upon your own soul all the healing powers of Christ, with which separately these individuals were healed. Only don't be ignorant of the measure of grace; don't let the enemy, while you sleep, maliciously sow tares (Matthew 13:25). Take care that as by your cleansing you have become an object of enmity to the Evil One, don't again make yourself an object of pity by sin. Be careful lest, while rejoicing and lifted up above measure by the blessing, you fall again through pride. Be diligent as to your cleansing, 'going up to the valley of weeping to the place which He has appointed' (Psalm 84:6 LXX). Keep with all diligence the remission which you have received as a gift, in order that, while the remission comes from God, the preservation of it may come from yourself also."

Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote¹⁴ that the example of the ten lepers means that we may gain soundness of body but succumb to ungodliness in the process. If we have experienced grave neglect, we need even greater repentance.

"I entreat you, beloved, let those words of the Savior touch your hearts. When by the power of His mercy He had cleansed ten lepers, He said that only one of them all had returned to give thanks (Luke 17:18). This means without doubt that, though the ungrateful ones had gained soundness of body, yet their failure in this godly duty arose from ungodliness of heart. Therefore, dearly-beloved, that this brand of ingratitude may not be applied to you, return to the Lord, remembering the marvels which He has granted to be performed among us. Do not ascribe our release as the ungodly suppose, to the influences of the stars, but to the unspeakable mercy of Almighty God. He has granted the softening of the hearts of raging barbarians; go to the commemoration of so great a benefit with all the vigor of faith. Grave neglect must be atoned for by yet greater tokens of repentance. Let us use the Mercy of Him, Who has spared us, to our own amendment. Let the blessed Peter and all the saints, who have always been near us in many afflictions, grant aid to our entreaties for you to the merciful God, through Jesus Christ our LORD. Amen."

The healing process here can be summarized by three words: cleansed (Luke 17:14), healed (Luke 17:15) and made well (Luke 17:19). The nine were cleansed and healed but not made well because they forgot to express their gratitude. They were satisfied too early with too little. From this we understand that faith and thanksgiving have a connection, where faith is the substance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1). The substance is baptism and its results.

The Greek word translated "made well" (Greek *sozo*) is translated almost everywhere else in the New Testament as "saved". For example:

- "Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).
- "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

¹⁴ Leo the Great, Sermons, 84, 2.

- “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:9-10).
- “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” (Romans 8:24).
- “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).
- “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

The implication of Jesus’ words, then, is that one can be healed, but not be saved! We can have great gifts given to us and still be lost, depending on the gratefulness of our hearts.

Cyril of Alexandria comments¹⁵ on this as follows, “And why did (Jesus) not rather say, ‘I will, be cleansed’, as He did in the case of another leper (Matthew 8:2) but commanded them rather to show themselves to the priests? He commanded them to go, as if being already healed, that they might bear witness to the priests, as the rulers of the Jews and ever envious of His glory, that wonderfully and beyond their hope, they had been delivered from their misfortune by Christ’s willing that they should be healed”. This occurred in 30 AD as Jesus headed for Jerusalem and the Cross (Luke 17:11, 18:31-33). A little over a year later (Pentecost, 31 AD), a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the Faith (Acts 6:7).

In a way we are all lepers to some extent, and the image of leprosy has been applied especially to heresy in the Church, because it is so contagious and destructive. Heretics have been cut off from the Church in ages past to avoid the leprous effect of their teaching.

This can be a lesson for us, also. Have we ever been given a gift from the Lord, where we know it’s His Will that we pursue this gift, but yet forget to take time out from our busy schedule to say thanks?

¹⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 17, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 466.