



Sunday, January 15, 2012 Healing of the Lepers – Grateful Prayer

Luke 17:12-19

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel accounts, both the historical narratives and the parables, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us great things by showing us what are actually very small things. For example, we can learn many important things from nature. If we have trouble understanding how a man live for one instant without God and His merciful love, all we have to do is think about how long we could live without air!

This reminds us of how utterly dependent we are on God, even when our mind is completely occupied with something else.

The same is true of the Gospel account appointed for this morning's reading in the Holy Liturgy. The Savior teaches us something great and large by using a small example—in this case, the healing of the lepers, of whom only one returned to thank Him for the healing. This was to teach us how vitally important it is for us to be constantly grateful to God for all the things He has given us, beginning with life itself, and then the possibility of salvation and eternal life with Him after we die. It is the sublime of lesson gratitude.

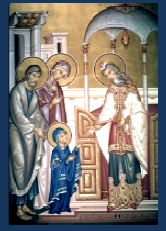
And this is why the Church urges us to say our daily prayers. The Morning Prayer rule, for instance, begins with thanksgiving:

"As I rise from sleep, I thank Thee, O Holy Trinity, for through Thy great goodness and patience Thou was not angry with me, an idler and sinner, nor hast Thou destroyed me with mine iniquities, but has shown Thy usual love for mankind."

Here, in this *single* sentence—composed, by the way by St. Basil the Great in the fourth century—we have a remarkable theological summary. First, gratitude is offered to the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but please note: this thanksgiving must be given sincerely and from our hearts, not just sleepily muttered words. Then, in that same first sentence of the prayer, we remind ourselves that God is pure goodness and patience—God of course already knows this about Himself, so it is for *us* that we make this statement about His goodness and patience. But, continuing on, so great is His goodness and patience that He has no anger for me, even though I am a great and lazy sinner and thoroughly deserve His chastisement. This is why we say that there is no anger—in the sense of the human passion that you and I know as anger—in God. His goodness and patience leave no room for such a thing. He is not a "cosmic terrorist," as some Christians preach.

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



And then, this first sentence of the Morning Prayer concludes with the acknowledgement that God has shown His “usual love for mankind.” In other words, He is *endlessly* loving us and *endlessly* patient with us, undeserving as we may, in actual fact, be.

This is echoed in the cry of the lepers in this morning’s Gospel. You will remember that they came to Christ, crying out with one voice: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Brothers and sisters, how many times do we sing, in the divine services, “Lord have mercy”—just like those lepers calling out to the Lord. And, you see, divine mercy implies *everything*: God’s love and patience, His desire to have us with Him for all time and eternity, and His willingness to forgive us and grant whatever we ask for that is for our welfare, health and salvation.

Yet only one of the lepers turned back to thank Jesus. But isn’t this like *us*? We begin our day muttering a morning prayer or skipping it altogether because, we tell ourselves, we are not awake yet or we are running late (and whose fault is that?), not thanking God for anything. Yet He has given us *everything!*—all that is good, beautiful and true in our lives has come from Him. Similarly, how often do we come to the end of the day without thanking Him for the blessings of the preceding day, and without asking His forgiveness for our sins? We fall drowsily into bed, like pagans, perhaps watching late night TV or listening to the radio in bed. Yes, in that case we are like pagans, like unbelievers, like men and women and children *who in fact do NOT believe in God!*

Brothers and sisters, these simple behaviors are among the very important ways in which we clearly demonstrate *whether or not* we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and Him crucified and risen...

Now, we often refer to the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion as “the Eucharist”. This word comes from the Greek, *eucharistia*, which means “thanksgiving.” In fact, there are a couple of specific places in the Liturgy where the priest chants, “Let us give *thanks* unto the Lord.”

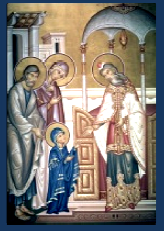
What are we “thanking” Him for? For everything of course, but especially, in the context of the Liturgy, we are thanking Him for giving Himself, body, soul and *divinity* to us in Holy Communion, the greatest of all the Holy Mysteries of the Church. Yet how often do we really feel thankful as we approach the Holy Chalice, or *after* we have received Communion? We bustle back to our places in the church and then, after the dismissal, we hasten to the parish hall to laugh and play and gossip.

Yet our loving God desires nothing more than to draw us closer to Him and to raise us *from* the degradation of sin *to* an extremely high and exalted level, as we were originally created in Adam and Eve. [As St. Nicolai Velimirovitch writes:] “He desires to share His merit with others, His riches with the poor, His glory with the needy and the sorrowing....”

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Can there be a more terrible reproach to us, who persist in living like pagans even though otherwise we may dutifully trot off to church on Sunday and even—sometimes without thinking—receive Holy Communion, as though on automatic pilot? How spiritually vulgar and stupid can we be, with such ungrateful self-display?

[Again, in the words of St. Nicolai:] “Oh, if we Christians knew the variety and number of the spiritual diseases from which Christ the Lord heals every day, we would quickly turn to Him, fall at His feet and thank Him from this moment to the hour of our death—*which hour is not far from any one of us*. To our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.”

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.