

## “Faith and Love”

St. Luke 17:11-19

September 13, 2020

SERMON 1933

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Our sermon text is from St. Luke 17:11, “Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who told these ten lepers that Jesus was so kind that He would receive their delegation? Who told them that Jesus desired to have mercy upon them? Who told them that Jesus would heal them of their leprosy?

**The confidence of faith is a tremendous thing!** The Word of God presents to us eternal truths and teaches us the way of God. The amazing thing is that God creates faith in our heart so that we believe it. We do not grope around in uncertainty. Christians are not wondering about whether they have done enough to be saved. They are not unsure of whether they will be received into eternal glory. We truly know what is the mind of God toward us.

Furthermore, this God-given faith is not simply about a future salvation, but daily trusts in the Lord for help and strength throughout this life. The faith of these lepers is seen in their actions toward Christ.

**First, they leave behind their dwelling to come to Jesus.** If they did not believe that He could help they would have stayed home. They would have said, “What’s the use? He’s just a fraud. Even if he could do something, he probably wouldn’t.” Faith changes people so that they reach out toward God.

**Second, these lepers lift up their voices in prayer to Jesus.** Faith cries out to the One who can help. There is not prayer to the One whom you do not believe. There is not conversation with someone who refuses to hear you. When you realize that the call has been dropped, you don’t continue to talk. “Can you hear me? Are you still there?” You put down the phone. These lepers are contagious and are maintaining a social distance of well over 6 feet. Nevertheless, they know that Jesus desires to hear their cry for help. They lift up their voice in true faith.

**Third, the content of their prayer is this, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”** **Faith relies upon the mercy of the Giver. Faith would never seek to merit a payment from God. Faith would never base its claim upon a man-made work.** These lepers know that they are unworthy and yet the confidence of faith trusts in the love and mercy of Jesus. We have nothing to offer him, but we know that He desires to give us unmerited kindness. He loves to have mercy upon the unworthy.

As for my initial question, we don’t know who told these lepers? The text of today’s Holy Gospel doesn’t tell us. The important thing is that someone did. Somehow and someday they came to know the teaching about the love of our Savior and now they have faith.

Allow me to contrast the actions of those who do not have faith with the faith of these lepers.

**First, there are unbelievers who do leave behind their dwellings to seek God.** They are ever seeking, but never finding. They attend for a while, but then grow tired of the effort. After all, they like the idea of finding God, but can never convince themselves that God is really there. And that is the problem. Faith isn't a decision for Jesus. If faith was convincing myself, then it wouldn't be able to sustain me in good times and in bad.

From time to time they darken the doors, but there is nothing to keep them coming. The Christians believes and thus He regularly seeks God. The unbeliever seeks God in order to convince himself of faith. It doesn't work.

**Second, there are unbelievers who can say the words.** They utter the prayers. They cross themselves and walk through the motions. They acknowledge the fact that the Triune God is God. They can give the right answers, but they don't cry out to God. Their words are less like prayers, and more like a pledge of allegiance. It really doesn't matter if God is listening on the other side. Like a child picking up a play phone and talking. "Hello. {wait} Yes, I'm fine. How are you? {wait}" To everyone around it sure looks like prayer, but the person talking isn't sure that anyone is there.

Whether it is the beauty of the singing of the liturgy, or the thumping emotionality of contemporary worship, the words are spoken, not in order to receive from God, but so that the human vow can be performed. When they are done with worship, they say, "I'm pretty sure I did something." But the reception of God's gifts requires the faith of the lepers. Whoever does not believe may have done something but they did not receive. James 1:6-7 says, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;"

**Third, someone told me that the distinction between faith and works was a difficult thing to understand.** This sounds like the person who agrees with whomever they are with. The person says, "Yes, I believe that we are saved by faith alone. But then I read that faith without works is dead and surely you have to do something. Right? God saved me, but I do try to lead a Christian life. You can't do anything you want!"

**The faith of these lepers is not confused about the distinction between God's mercy and human merit.** These lepers don't ask for mercy, but hedge their bet with good works. They don't say, "Have mercy on me, because I've been trying to be good." Faith will trust in nothing but the loving kindness of God in Jesus Christ. It is quite simple.

Faith doesn't speak about human merit when requesting help from God. The reason that faith cries out to God is because He is loving, and He gives out His gifts freely to those who don't deserve it. Faith would never use good works to motivate God. If faith included human merit as even a partial reason for God's response, the whole thing would be in doubt. These lepers cry out for mercy, because that is the reason and the ground of their faith-filled request. Jesus' mercy is sure and certain!

When faith trusts that God has gifted us with all that we need, the person is free to do good works of love toward the neighbor. The person who believes, does good works to thank God for His mercy. The person who doesn't believe, does good works to

try to convince God to help him. That person is never sure that God has helped or will help.

The unbeliever needs those works for himself. He needs them to bargain with God. He needs them to convince his neighbor that he believes. He needs them to convince himself that he believes. In the end, he is never convinced. The unbeliever says, "The suffering and death of Jesus Christ is fine and good, but then there is the Ten Commandments. What about my love and actions?"

The confidence of faith comes from the Word of God, which teaches us that all have fallen short of the glory of God and the gift of God is eternal salvation. Jesus Christ went around preaching the Gospel message that He would take away the sins of the world. In today's text Jesus was going to Jerusalem in order to suffer and die. On the way He preached in midst of Samaria and Galilee. Jesus could have gone directly to Jerusalem, but instead He meandered through these regions in order that others might hear the faith-creating message of salvation. Although we don't know who told these lepers, we know that they heard the good news of the Gospel!

**Before there can be faith, there needed to be the preaching of the love of Jesus Christ, who desires all men to be saved.** Before there can be the cry of faith, there needs to be the preaching of Jesus' love for the unworthy. Before there can be the obedience of faith which goes to the priest, there must be the unswerving confidence that Jesus Christ has heard their prayer and healed them.

**The love of God is seen in Jesus' going out to preach and teach far and wide. The truth that God desires our cries for help is seen in Jesus' listening to the leper's cries for mercy. Finally, God does desire to help, for Jesus grants mercy to these lepers.**

The believer walks in the spirit and does not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, because he trusts in the works of God. How do you know that God is loving, hears your prayer, and will give you mercy? **You know it because you have heard about the works of God.** "My son, given attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart" (Proverbs 4:20-21).

**First, God baptized you** in water and the word and made you His child. He washed away your sin and gave you a new heart. In baptism, He promised to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has done it.

**Second, God preached to you** the message of the Gospel. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. God has established churches and sent out pastors to preach to you the message that you are saved by grace through faith without works. God has done it. Jesus performed the work of our salvation when He suffered and died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

**Third, God has left you a memorial** of His love for you in the sacrament of the altar. Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night in which He was betrayed instituted a meal in which you receive the benefits of His Body and Blood. Jesus' own words drip with love for you, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Like these lepers you have the confidence of faith. You believe that Jesus is so kind that He would receive you. You know that Jesus desired to have mercy upon you. You know that Jesus is keeping you from all things hurtful and leading you to all things profitable to your salvation.

**The confidence of faith is a tremendous thing!** The Word of God presents to us eternal truths and teaches us the way of God. The amazing thing is that God creates faith in our heart so that we believe it. We do not grope around in uncertainty. Christians are not wondering about whether they have done enough to be saved. We are not unsure of whether we will be received into eternal glory. We truly know what is the mind of God toward us. "The Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold" (Ps 84).