

## Jesus and the Leper



And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter (Mark 1:40-45)

He was standing in front of a shopping center. There was a short notice by his side that read: ‘I have AIDS. Would you come and hug me?’ People were passing by. Most were too busy to notice him. Those who stumbled upon him immediately moved away after reading the writing. Those with some friends debated whether to do it. A few did it for fun, some did it to test their courage and other to show off. Then, an old woman approached and embraced him wholeheartedly. ‘I feel so sorry for you’, she said.

### The Leper

The book of Leviticus had strict regulations for those sick with infectious skin diseases. A leper “must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ . . . He must live alone; he must live outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:45-46). Such a person was an outcast. A life of loneliness and isolation was his or her destiny.

The Bible contains two types of prayers: that of request and that of gratitude. These two types, namely ‘Lord, please’ and ‘Lord, thank you’, are related. The latter springs from the former. In the Scripture, people ask for understanding and life, healing and forgiveness, freedom and peace. Their pleas reveal their faith. Trusting God’s ability to grant their petition, they ask. Their pleas also reveal their hope. Desiring that God will change their dire situation, they entreats Him. The leper believed that Christ could cure him. He also hoped. He runs to the Savior, kneels in front of him and prays: “If you will, you can make me clean” (Mk 1:40). How to we approach God in prayer?

When request is granted thanksgiving springs from the heart. After being healed, the leper could not control himself and went around telling everybody what Jesus did for him. It was his way of thanking God for the miracle. Most of us know how to ask. But, do we know how to thank? At the beginning of our journey, we ask for a safe trip, but after

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reaching our destination safely, we say nothing. We say grace at the beginning of a meal, but we seldom thank God at the end of it. If we only ask but never thank we are ungrateful. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus healed ten lepers but only one came back to thank him. Facing the situation, Jesus asked:

Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner (Luke 17:16-17)?

‘Thank you’ is such a beautiful phrase.

### Jesus

The Law of Moses clearly stated: “Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening” (Numbers 19:22). And yet, “moved with compassion Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man” (Mark 1:41).

The Gospel of John says that “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). There are many Christians who are followers of Moses. They often talk about rules and regulations. There are few who follow Jesus and extend their help towards brothers and sisters in need.

Jesus made himself unclean to make that man clean and he paid the price. The Gospel tells us that “Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places” (Mk 1:45). We can sense the message of Christian faith. Our Lord “took up our infirmities and carried our diseases” (Matt 8:17). Paul goes even further, saying:

God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might

become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

Our Savior teaches us a new way of prayer that goes beyond ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. Jesus took our infirmities and our sins on himself. He gave his life for the salvation of the world. He did not come to be served but to serve. A true prayer leads to transformation. Jesus got dirty so the leper could be clean. He got on his knees to wash the feet of his disciples. Paul was willing to give up his relationship with Jesus just to see his own people coming to faith.

I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3).

How about us?

### Conclusion

The hug of the old woman did not cure the young man but it brought him healing. Her loving, motherly embrace removed the curse that society put on him. Tears running down his cheeks were cleansing his troubled soul.

And now faith, hope, charity abide, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Cor 13:13).

The leper’s faith and hope met Jesus’ love and he got healed. He knew how to ask and how to thank. Our Lord knows how to take, give, and serve. We might find ourselves in the situation of the leper but we are followers of Christ. It is not enough to ask and thank. Mature Christians, following Jesus, get dirty so that others can get clean.

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**May God bless all of you who remember us in prayer and support our ministry here.**

New Life Asia Team