

Let Us Learn to Be Christian

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

Sunday, September 5, 2021

Luke 17:11–19

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us learn to be Christian. Yes, you are a Christian. You are Baptized. You have been washed in those holy waters and cleansed of your sin. You are bound up in the life of Christ in His death and resurrection. You have eternal life. There is nothing you need to do to be a Christian just as you did not become a Christian by anything you accomplished. Christ has accomplished your salvation and keeps you in it.

But let us learn to be Christian. Let us grow as Christians and not become stagnant in our faith. We should not discount the overwhelming power of Satan to destroy our faith. He never rests in tempting us to evil. He is so deceitful he points us to ourselves and our faith and the good things we do. He is always trying to turn our attention away from Christ.

Let us go to the Scriptures and learn from the lepers in the Gospel reading to be Christian. They stood at a distance. They were scorned by the community. They suffered not from leprosy as we know it, which is called Hansen's disease, but from various skin disorders. But what made their condition wretched was that they were unclean. This isolation was not a simple a societal health matter. They were not allowed to be in the community of believers until the priest would declare them to be clean. The examination by the priests of their skin is detailed in the book of Leviticus. This was one of the ways in which God's people were to be set apart and kept holy for Him. God Himself is holy and demands that those who are in communion with Him be holy. The sin that entered the world brought about a host of troubles that we see in history and are still in force today with disease and disasters and the wicked acts of people.

We Christians understand that brutal regimes and dictators and a society that opposes the truth of God's Word when it comes to marriage and sexuality and the sanctity of life are under the judgment of the holy God. But do we fail to see how we ourselves do not show common decency and respect for others when we immediately think the worst of others' actions instead of putting the best construction on it? How can we stand in condemnation of evil if we believe that we would never sink to such atrocities as others have? Why are we so confident in our strong faith when we question why God would allow devastation such as those in Haiti and Afghanistan and Louisiana have recently suffered? Why do we expect God to align His will with ours when we ourselves suffer affliction?

Yes, you and I are Christians. But let us learn to be Christian. Let us learn from the ten men who stood at a distance and cried out: Jesus, Master, have mercy on us! Obviously those in such

a pitiable state were in need of compassion. But what about you and me? You and I need help to see that we are equally in a wretched state. You may not be afflicted as those lepers were with various skin disorders. But what is in your heart? What does your mind and will produce? What naturally flows forth from your desires and will? The apostle Paul makes it clear in the Epistle reading: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar.

You are Christians. But does not your sinful flesh envelope your heart, soul, strength, and mind? You are in no better condition than those lepers or those who commit unthinkable atrocities. Confess your sin. Cry out for mercy! Learn from these lepers what it means to be Christian.

Here now is where the Church in her wisdom through the ages has helped you learn to be Christian in the liturgy. Have you ever noticed that we pray the Kyrie when our preparation for worship in Confession and Absolution ends and we begin the Service of the Word? *Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.* We might think this would properly come before we confess our sin. But it is after the Absolution, when your sins are forgiven. This is what it means to be Christian. The perpetual cry of the Church is the Kyrie: Lord, have mercy. In all things let this be your Christian prayer.

Look to those lepers and see their faith in crying out for mercy, Lord, Master, have mercy on us. They were unclean and would not be able to be in the community until they were declared clean by the priest. Jesus said to them, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And see their faith! They turned and went. As they were going do you suppose that they were looking at their skin and wondering why they were supposed to show up to the temple to be examined by the priests when their flesh was still defiled? Yet they responded to Jesus' command and went.

And it was then that they were cleansed. Jesus ordered them to go to the priests and yet He Himself cleansed them. They continued on their way, excited to stand before the priest to be declared that they were now clean. They could once again be part of the community.

But there was one who stopped. He turned back and his gratitude and praise overflowed into worship. Learn what it means to be Christian from this one, a foreigner, a Samaritan. It was this one who expressed the true worship of God. He fell down on his face to worship God in the flesh. How could he go to a priest when the one who truly declares a person clean was right there before him? Learn from this Samaritan to be Christian and worship the true God. He is in the flesh. Whatever your ailments, whatever your struggles with temptation, whatever your worries, whatever your failings, pray with the Church of all times and places, Lord, have mercy, and bow down before Him.

When Jesus breathed His last on the cross Luke tells us of another foreigner. The centurion cried out, "Truly this man was the righteous one." As Christians we confess the same about our

Lord, the righteous having taken the place of the unrighteous; the pure and holy one for we who are unclean and dead in our sinful flesh. Christ suffered, taking into Himself your infirmities and iniquities. He has cleansed you. You are Baptized. He has brought your sinful flesh into His own pure flesh and has crucified it. He has raised you up into His risen, living flesh.

This is why you pray for mercy. You are a Christian. Your perpetual cry for mercy He answers by giving you His very flesh to eat and His precious blood to drink. Lord, have mercy. Does He direct you to a human being to declare you clean? Rather, He Himself cleanses you by saying, "Take and eat, this is My body, given for you. Take and drink, this is My blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins." This body and blood of your Lord Jesus Christ strengthens and preserves you in body and soul to life everlasting. Amen.

SDG

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