

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. (Mk 1:40-45 NIV)

Who trusts in God a strong abode In heaven and earth possesses; Who looks in love to Christ above, No fear that heart oppresses. In you alone, dear Lord, we own Sweet hope and consolation, Our shield from foes, our balm for woes, Our great and sure salvation.

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour IX: "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" (Psa 103:2-3 NIV) Jesus came, preached the gospel + cast out demons. He cures the blind, heals lepers, makes the lame walk and the deaf hear. He brings divine abundance even as he returns people into the communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Remember from yesterday's OT reading how in Jacob's dream there at Bethel the ladder spans the great divide between heaven and earth? The angels moving up and down and connecting the forlorn sojourner, who is resting with his tired head on that stone under the starry sky, with the heavenly home and the living God enthroned above all and the centre of all?

Well, it's our Lord Jesus Christ's mission to seek the lost and bring back home those far away travellers like Jacob, the distant refugees fleeing the chaos in Syria, the destitute migrants criss-crossing the continents today, but also those way out in the sticks, desperate on high seas or just hopelessly messed up and outcast and with nowhere to go as we know them in our neighbourhoods too – in the Midcity, in the suburbs and townships. He seeks them out in great mercy and with real comfort and help. He finds them like the Good Samaritan found that man fallen by the wayside under attack by robbers. He brings them home to the waiting heavenly Father even if he first puts them up in this or that inn, sanctuary or healing hospital on the way like the Good Samaritan did.

The goal remains the heavenly abode, that has been prepared for each one of us, which is ready for us already and to that great joy that reigns there in the heavenly realms over just one sinner, who repents and comes to conversion and is returned back home, restored to the honours and

privileges of the very own heavenly & godly children – no longer despised, no longer lost, no longer orphans, refugees, foreigners and homeless. Imagine the joy if all the saints are marching in. Yes, and you'll be right part of that number too – by God's grace I'll be part of that number too. His mission comes to the climax in the suffering, crucifixion and death on Golgotha and his victorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. When our Lord IX starts to gather his scattered disciples and restores these desperate and hopeless cases to the abundant joy and wonderful celebration of his victory over death, sin and devil. It's the triumphant march, that has not stopped even today, but is still continuing to gather strength, numbers and joyous momentum over the globe as the Holy Spirit gathers, collects and brings them to IX in the true faith by the workings and mission of his Holy Christian Church. The number of the elect and predestined is nearly full. Our Lord is about to return in glory and all and everybody will see him returning in the glorious manifestation of his power and authority over all. Every knee will bow before him – even those of the greatest tyrants here on earth – and every mouth will confess that IX is the Lord of all and worthy of all praise, blessing, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, glory and might belong to him, our living God, forever and ever. Amen.

Well, that's what the Church confesses and what all Christians believe and trust in. Still we are plagued with disbelief, doubt and mistrust. Perhaps we're not quite as blatantly disobedient as this healed, but disobedient leper, but we can probably all identify with his careful request, somewhat sceptical even: "If you are willing, you can make me clean!" See, most of us don't have a problem with acknowledging the omnipotence of the living God and his power to do great things. We know, we confess and even share the faith, that Jesus can heal – if he's willing (*Deo volente*/God willing) Our problem is that we are too often plagued with the doubt that he's actually going to heal, save and bless us – willing to save me too! For I'm but a poor, miserable sinner – and who am I to receive such great blessings like healing, forgiveness and God's abundant love, grace and mercy. Have we not been disappointed just too often? Don't the sufferings of our past and present just overwhelm us so that we can just not see his goodness and mercy that is new every morning? And is our faith and hope and trust not just too weak to be joyful in confidence that yes, it is well with my soul – it is well! Please look how Jesus deals with this poor leper. He does not reprimand him for his little faith – even though he has every right to be indignant at its demonstration. Rather Jesus Christ – the living God and this true mirror of the Father's very own heart and inmost will has pity on this man. He stretches out his hand, touches this unclean specimen and says to him the wonderful words: "I will – I want to – I do! Be clean" And it happens immediately, right there and then. Creatio

Wilhelm Weber, P.

ex nihilo. Out of nothing. Healing were before there was just illness. Purity and sanctified holiness were before there was but stinking filth and infectious illness, holy life out of sinful death. The leprosy left the man and he was clean, free and restored. Wonderful miracle of God's goodness and mercy. So: "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases."

Still the story is not finished yet. The healed man now gets clear instructions from his Lord and master IX. You'd expect that this word bears a lot of authority with the healed man now that he is no longer sick, but well. Our Lord instructs him to follow the lawful procedure, show himself to the priests, get the certification of healing from the proper authorities and bring the appropriate sacrifices and offerings in the temple. Obey the laws of God. Do what is right. And don't talk about this, because there is still more to come and that first has to be in place. People will not understand this correctly. They will have the wrong idea, just as they did with the feeding of the 5k, when they tried to make IX breadking or when at the triumphant entry into Jerusalem they wanted to crown him king of Israel.

Our Lord knows that he is only understood rightly through the perspective of suffering, cross and dying. That leads to the resurrection and glorification of Easter. Without that the picture of IX is incomplete and misleading. But the healed man does not get it. He wanted healing and that's what he got. He sees IX as a means to an end and not as the highest good, the living God and all in all. That's why he just goes about ignoring Jesus, forgetting his instruction and talking freely about his healing and recovery. This however forced Jesus into hiding. His time had not yet come. There was still other work to be done before he would go up to Jerusalem to suffer, be crucified and die to rise again in glory on the 3rd day. That's why he went out into desolate places, into the desert and out in the sticks. Later this would be called the mystery of the Messiah.

We however can take two very clear messages from this short episode in the holy gospel of St. Mark. Firstly: Jesus has pity on poor, lost and desperate people like this man plagued by leprosy. This is not just helpless pity like we often have, when people around us suffer badly, but we can't really help. No, our Lord Jesus Christ has pity. He wants to help, heal, cleanse, forgive, save and restore. And – that is the 2nd part: Jesus does so. He does so even if that man didn't have the pure, complete or absolute faith. He does so even if he knows this man will disobey his stern and clear charge and command: Don't! Still, he heals him. Still, he lets him go. Still, he grants him his greatest wish and prayer. Jesus deals with us poor miserable sinners not like we deserve, but according to

his great mercy and kindness, his pity and goodness. Remember yesterday's gospel, how out of 10 but only one turns around and gives praise to God. Still IX heals them all.

Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. (Psa 103:1-13 NIV) Therefore praise the Lord o my soul and all my inmost being his holy name. Amen.

In all the strife of mortal life Our feet will stand securely; Temptation's hour will lose it power, For you will guard us surely. Our God, renew with heavenly dew Our body, soul, and spirit Until we stand at your right hand Through Jesus' saving merit. (LW 414:3)