



GOSPEL GOSSIP

'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?'

St Luke 17. 11-19

Sunday 12 October

This week's gospel reading is about Jesus healing 10 lepers. Leprosy in his time was a dreadful disease, and for those who suffered from it, it was a living death. Even in the Middle Ages in this country, when someone was recognised as having the disease, they underwent a ritual 'funeral' to show that they were no longer part of this world. 2000 years ago, lepers were outcasts, physically and spiritually. They were 'unclean' and so could no longer function as members of their society, forever living on the edges of humanity, begging for alms. Clearly they must have sinned greatly to be afflicted with such a dreadful disease, so the religious people could have no direct dealings with them as, apart from the risk of infection, contact with an unclean person would leave you unclean yourself. The ten lepers who Jesus came across in his travels, spent their lives begging and dependent upon the charity of others, with only other lepers and outcasts for company. Maybe they recognised Jesus as a teacher, a prophet, so their cries were for divine assistance, not for money or food and clothing. They believed that they were cursed and forsaken by God; years of being told so would have that effect. So even God had cast them off. Yet they still persevered in hope – or because they knew nothing else?

- What sort of people are 'unclean' or 'outcasts' today?
- Where do you see them?
- Is it apparent that you might look down on them?
- Do you listen to their requests for help or turn a deaf ear?
- If you were in their position, would you wish for charity or pity, or compassion?

One of the lepers suffered from a double stigma. Not only was he a leper, but he was a Samaritan. Samaritans were shunned by Jews who regarded them as spiritually inferior. It says something of the levelling nature of disease that what united the ten was their leprosy not their religious views. Jesus, hearing their cries for mercy, not healing, had compassion and healed them. He instructed them to go to the priests, the only people who could re-introduce them once more into Jewish life, and pronounce them cleansed. We don't know what the other nine did after their healing, but we do know that it was the Samaritan who came back to give thanks to God through Jesus.

- Do you always show gratitude, or do you take too much for granted?
- How often have you been offended and reacted against others' ingratitude towards you?
- Is God any different – if, so why?
- Are you carried away with something to the extent that you actually miss the point?
- Can you make amends – and how?

We're not sure of the faith of the other nine lepers. When they reached the priests, were they still cured? After asking about the other nine, Jesus turns to the Samaritan and reassures him that his faith had made him well. Was it because he had recognised – and acknowledged – the true source of his healing? This week's gospel reading reminds us of our dependence on God in both this world and the next, and also of our need to be grateful. Not a fawning, insincere gratitude, but that genuine thanks which comes from the heart and is recognised as such by the one to whom we are thankful.