

The Leprosy of Sin



We find throughout Scripture and all through Our Lord's teaching that the truths about spiritual realities are very often conveyed to us by means of sensible things, by means of sensible images. When Our Lord wants to teach us about the invisible grace of God working in the souls of men, He tells us a story about a sower going out to sow seed in a field. When He wants to teach us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, He compares it to all kinds of sensible things that we experience in life: a mustard seed that grows into the largest of shrubs, a treasure hidden in the field, or a merchant in search of fine pearls. And Our Lord does this because, knowing our human nature very well, He understands that we come to a knowledge of things that are unseen through things that are seen.

In a similar way, it is not difficult for us to see in the story of the healing of the Leper, which begins our Maronite season of Lent, a kind of physical image for

a deeper spiritual reality. Scripture frequently makes use of bodily diseases as an image of the diseases of the soul. And so, reading this story in harmony with Scripture as a whole, we can make use of this image of physical leprosy in order to help us see and understand a reality that we are not able to perceive with our bodily senses: the leprosy of the soul that is caused especially by sin.

“There exists the curious fact that men can, and often do, freely choose to do things that cause a leprosy of the soul.”

Leprosy of the body is a slow, degenerative disease that attacks the living tissues of the body and deforms it, making the body ugly and repulsive. No one in his right mind would ever freely choose to contract the disease of leprosy. But there

exists the curious fact that men can, and often do, freely choose to do things that cause a leprosy of the soul. There are even those you will find promoting diseases of the soul as if they were the way to true happiness and human flourishing. There are multi-billion dollar industries out there whose purpose is to promote

and advance leprosy of the human soul and it's rather an amazing thing that many people don't even seem to see this as a problem. So it is obvious that men have a harder time seeing the diseases of the soul than they do the diseases of the body.

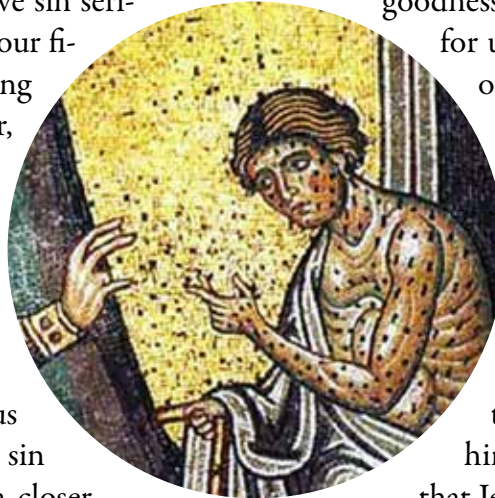
Scripture is very clear that the greatest evil in the world and the greatest evil that we ourselves have to struggle with is the evil of sin. It is the very nature of sin that it is a kind of idolatry. When we sin seriously, we are making some creature our final end; we are, in effect, worshipping some creature in place of the Creator, whether that creature is money, pleasure, power or ourselves and our own comfort. Sin is the only thing that can cause us to separate ourselves from God and His love.

But there is another way, a more subtle way, in which sin can keep us from God. Another way in which sin can hinder us from entering into a closer union with God. I think this is something that happens rather frequently among people who are trying to live good Christian lives, who are striving for perfection. Because sin is an offense against God Himself, something displeasing to Him, there can be a very human tendency on our part to think that we can't approach God and we can't seek to enter into an intimate communion with Him as long as we are conscious of our sinfulness. There can be a notion that we have to rid ourselves of our sinfulness before we can come close to God; that in order to approach God we already have to be perfect and pure.

That is a rather subtle, but a very great deception, and exactly the opposite of the truth. If we wait until we are saints before we start to seek to have a close relationship with Jesus, we will never have the chance of getting there. What is needed to have an intimate relationship with Christ is not moral perfection. Our Lord doesn't demand moral perfection of us to come to Him. What He **does** demand, and what is needed more than anything is a deep faith and trust in His goodness and His mercy.

In the spiritual life, the Theological Virtues of faith,

hope and charity hold primacy of place, not the moral virtues. Christ came to call to Himself the sinners, not the righteous. Our sin and our misery are the very things that give us a claim to His mercy. St. Thérèse would delight in coming to see her imperfection because she realized that it gave her another motive for going to God and experiencing the depth of His mercy; it gave her another reason for abandoning herself in trust to God's goodness. She understood also that God's love



for us is such that He wants to make use of everything to draw us closer to Him, even our sins. There is a certain sense in which we can say that what God needs in order to reveal Himself fully to us is our misery and sinfulness.

The leper in the Gospel is actually a great model for us. He did not let the repulsiveness of his disease prevent him from going up to Jesus. He knew that Jesus was the only one who could help him; Jesus was His *only hope*. He had a complete trust in the goodness and the power of Jesus. Likewise, the only one who can possibly help us and heal us of our sinfulness is Our Lord and so we make a great mistake in the spiritual life if we let our sense of sinfulness and our faults and failings keep us from seeking a close union with Jesus.

Jacques Philippe, in one of his works, has this to say: *"From all that we have just said, there follows a rule of conduct that is very important to keep in mind when we should happen to commit a fault. We certainly must feel sorry for having sinned, ask God for pardon, humbly beg Him to accord us the grace not to offend Him again in this way, and resolve to go to confession at an opportune moment. Without making ourselves sad or discouraged, we should recover our peace as quickly as possible thanks to the graces from on high, and resume our normal spiritual life as if nothing had happened. The more quickly we recover our peace, the better it will be! We make much more progress in this way than by becoming irritated with ourselves!"*

"A very important, concrete example is the following: when we commit some fault or other, under the assault of

a trial that seizes us, we are often tempted to grow slack in our prayer life, to not spend, for example, our usual time in silent meditation. And we manage to find good justification for this: 'How can I who have just fallen into sin, who have offended the Lord, how can I present myself before Him in this state?' And we need sometimes several days before we can resume our normal habits of prayer. But this is a grave error; this is nothing but false humility inspired by the devil. We must above all not change our habits of prayer. Quite the contrary. Where will we find healing for our faults if not close to Jesus? Our sins are a very poor pretext for distancing ourselves from Him, because the more we sin, the more we have a right precisely to approach Him who says: The healthy are not in need of a doctor — the sick are....Indeed, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Mt. 9:12-13).

"If we wait until we are saints to have a regular life of prayer, we could wait a long time. On the contrary, it is in

accepting to appear before the Lord in our state of sin that we will receive healing and will be transformed, little by little, into saints.

"There is an important illusion that must be exposed: we would like to present ourselves before the Lord only when we are presentable, well-groomed and content with ourselves! But there is a lot of presumptuousness in that attitude! In effect, we would like to bypass the need for mercy. But what is the nature of this pseudo-sanctity to which we sometimes aspire unconsciously and which would result in our thinking that we no longer have need of God? True sanctity is, on the contrary, to increasingly recognize how much we absolutely depend upon His mercy!"

And so let us follow the good example of the leper in the Gospel who was not ashamed to beg for mercy and had a deep trust and confidence in finding it in Jesus. ✚

Good News for our Benefactors

We recently learned that the CARES act, passed by Congress, increased tax deductions for gifts made to charities this year. For the 2021 tax year, there is an above-the-line tax deduction of \$300 for individual filers and \$600 for joint filers.

We hope this helps all of our benefactors, whose generosity and goodness have helped us so much.

God bless you all!

