

‘Thy Kingdom Come’... ...‘My Will Be Done’

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year B

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1
Mark 1:40-45

If you’ve heard one story about Jesus curing a leper, be it one or ten, you’ve pretty much heard them all, right down to Jesus’ instruction to the leper to show himself to the priest (in accordance with the law spelled out in Leviticus 14:2-32). Yet how often do we note the details of the story, particularly the aftermath? In the Gospel of Mark (1:40-45) the healing of a leper is one of Jesus’ earliest miracles. It begins a pattern wherein Jesus instructs the miracle’s recipient to keep the event to himself. This story, however, does not end on a positive note.

The Book of Leviticus dictates the law that a leper is to dwell outside the community, in deserted places, announcing him or herself to be unclean. When Jesus cures the leper in Mark’s Gospel, however, it is Jesus who ends up in that position; as the Gospel tells us: *“it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places...”* (Mk 1:45). This constitutes a complete reversal of roles between Jesus, who is socially alienated, and the cured-leper, now returning to society. Why is this the case? What has caused this to happen?

The Gospel story gives us the answer. Jesus *“warn[ed] him sternly... ‘see that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed’”* (Mk 1:44). The cured-leper, however, disregards this reasonably simple command. On the contrary, *“the man went away and began to publicize the whole*



matter” (Mk 1:45). It is the cured-leper’s public declaration of his cure - with no mention of him actually fulfilling his obligations under the Mosaic Law - that leads to Jesus’ isolation to deserted places, unable to enter the town freely.

Consequently, while we are moved by the leper’s faith – *“If you wish, you can make me clean”* (Mk 1:40) – we are not impressed

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with his flagrant disobedience of a very straightforward command – *“tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest.”* We must also note the simple fact that, for the cured-leper, both Jesus’ desire and command were apparently lesser considerations. In the end, the cured-leper’s disobedience of Christ’s command proved to be a hindrance to Christ’s work, leading to Christ’s isolation from the town.

Our first instinct is to come to the defense of the cured-leper. One can certainly understand the cured-leper’s excitement, and his desire to proclaim from the rooftops what Jesus had done. I can imagine that if I had been a victim of a dreaded disease that isolated me from society, and then experienced a miraculous cure at the hands of Jesus Himself, I would certainly be tempted to proclaim it for all to hear! Many of us might feel the same way. Many of us would come from the spiritual outlook: “I want to proclaim Christ’s goodness to me!” Yet how many of us would seriously consider Christ’s order to the contrary? How many of us would counter with: “Jesus just has to understand!” or put precisely – “I know better than Jesus what I must do!”?

When all is said and done, such rationalization is the root of all temptation and sin. “I know better than God!” “God has to understand!” “God’s command is secondary to what I decide I want to do!” All acts of disobedience to God emerge from this fundamental spiritual disposition, from the most basic instructions in practicing one’s faith (like attending Mass on Sunday and receiving the sacraments on a regular basis) to the most challenging commands of God’s law

that call us to live by certain values and standards; even those that fly in the face of popular culture, “modern” thinking and political correctness.

While we experience God’s goodness; while we endeavor to follow Christ as members of His Church; we nonetheless, disobey, because in the end “God has to understand,” that “we know better.” Like the leper, we discount the precepts of our faith, and disregard the command of the very God whose goodness we are so feverishly eager to receive. The result: Christ’s ongoing work is not helped, but hindered. Jesus continues to be marginalized to deserted places and is unable to “enter the town.”

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As people of faith, raised in a post-modern culture in which matters of faith are often secondary to “educated” and “enlightened” minds, where our own social, cultural and intellectual acumen may lead to the temptation that “I know better,” let us be renewed in the basic call of all followers of Christ to be obedient to His commands and to the teachings and direction of His Church. Let us resolve, in

humility and trust, to recognize God’s goodness to us, and manifest it by our proclamation of His Good News by first living in obedience to His Son’s Gospel. In this way, as members of His Church, we will not be obstructions to His ongoing work, in more ways than we know, but assets, by our obedience to even what may seem to be the most insignificant of His commands.

Fr. Bill Nicholas
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