

The 14th Sunday after Trinity
September 13, 2009
Luke 17:11-19

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On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

It's an urgent plea for help, a cry prompted by desperate need, and recognition of one's utter inability to help himself.

"Jesus, have mercy on us!"

This plea for mercy is one our Lord heard repeatedly during His ministry.

- from the Canaanite woman who cried, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."*¹
- to the man who pled, *"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly."*²
- to the two blind men who followed Jesus, crying aloud, *"Have mercy on us, Son of David."*³
- and to the blind beggar who cried out, *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* And when the crowd rebuked him, telling him to be silent, he cried out all the more, *"Son of David, have mercy on me!"*⁴

In most of these examples, from Jesus' ministry, of people crying out for mercy, the need was usually a physical one, something that could be seen or felt and had to be faced every day—leprosy, epilepsy, blindness—things from which there was no escape, and for which there was no human help.

I think we can easily identify with this. Most if not all of us have or will have the experience of being brought to our knees at some point in our lives and to a cry of "Lord, have mercy!" by a physical or temporal problem that we just can't handle ourselves: an illness or disability that medicine can't cure, a relationship issue, a financial issue, or the like. As the first events of September 11th, 2001 unfolded, the enormity and uncertainties of that event brought many in our nation to plead, "Lord, have mercy!"

¹ Matthew 15

² Matthew 17

³ Matthew 9

⁴ Luke 18

But it's unfortunate that it takes such major crises in our lives to bring us to "Lord, have mercy!" and to the recognition that everything in life—every breath we take, every bite of food, every heartbeat, every blink of the eye—comes from the mercy of God. And if His mercy were withdrawn for even a nanosecond, we would crumble and fold into nothingness.

"Lord, have mercy!"

Let us learn not merely to make it a cry of last resort, but to live each moment in the awareness of our utter dependence on God's mercy, and confessing with Psalm 115:

*"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory."*⁵

And if this is true of our physical needs—(that we are utterly dependent on the mercy of God every single moment of our lives)—how much more is it true of our spiritual needs?!

Every time we gather for worship we lift up our voices and cry with the lepers, "*Lord, have mercy!*" "*Christ, have mercy!*" "*Lord, have mercy!*" And the mercy we pray for is not just for our physical condition, but also (and most importantly) for our spiritual condition—for the leprosy of sin that clings to our nature from conception to the grave, and not only mars the perfect happiness that God intended for us His creation, but also ruins our relationship with the Creator, and enslaves us in the realm of Satan, threatening to leave us as enemies of God forever.

But do we truly admit this? Do you believe that without the continuing mercy of God you would be lost? Do you believe that, apart from the Lord's constant shower of mercy, the very best you offer to Him would be filth in His eyes? Do you confess that your standing before God and your eternal fate would be desperate, and in fact hopeless without God's intervention with His mercy and grace? To use the language of today's epistle reading from Galatians, without the mercy of the Lord we can only "*gratify the desires of the flesh.*" And thus, without His mercy—daily, richly, constantly—we "*cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*"⁶

Thus, our Kyrie, our "*Lord, have mercy*" is not only to join occasionally with the cry of the lepers or the blind man for physical healing, but it is to join each Lord's Day, in each Divine Service, and in fact each and every day, and each and every moment of our lives with the cry of King David in Psalm 51:

*"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions."*⁷

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Or as today's Collect sums it up:

Lord, keep Your Church with Your perpetual mercy;
and because of our frailty we cannot but fall,

⁵ Psalm 115:1

⁶ Galatians 5:16, 21

⁷ Psalm 51:1

keep us ever by Your help from all things hurtful
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation;

And God's good news to you is that by His grace and mercy, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ does exactly that. He "passes along," no longer on His way to Jerusalem, but now having come from Jerusalem where He gave His life on the cross to pay for our sins and to restore our relationship with the Father. By His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus rescued us from the realm of Satan and reconciled us to the Father so that we do not have to remain God's enemies forever.

Jesus has had mercy on you, as He met you in Holy Baptism and washed you clean from the leprosy of sin, making you pure and spotless in God's eyes.

He has heard your "Lord, have mercy" and keeps you in His perpetual mercy as He sends you to the priests—to His pulpit and altar—to hear His Gospel Word of forgiveness which frees you, and to receive His Holy body and blood which cleanses you from all sin.

And by His Holy Spirit, our Lord daily and richly leads us, His Church, to all things profitable for our salvation.

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good! And His mercy endures forever!"

O give thanks to the Lord that He hears our urgent pleas for mercy—both physical and spiritual!
O give thanks to the Lord that He graciously supplies all that we need to support this body and life... and that, according to His abundant mercy, He blots out all our transgressions!

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"