

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ: Christ is among us!

Leprosy is a skin disease that receives a whole chapter in the Book of Leviticus. Anyone with leprosy was unclean and unfit to live with the rest of the community. They were required to announce themselves as unclean to anyone who approached. Today Jesus heals ten men who had leprosy. And, as almost every gospel passage where we hear a Samaritan mentioned, the usual expectations are upended. After Pascha we hear that it is a Samaritan woman with whom Jesus speaks and brings her to faith in Him. It is the Samaritan, the enemy of the Jew felled by robbers, the Samaritan who shows compassion on the near-dead man. Today's gospel is no different. Of the ten men Jesus healed, only one man, a Samaritan, is the one who came back to tell Jesus "thank you." The nine Israelites went their way without a word of thanks to Jesus. One out of ten shows gratitude to Jesus for His compassionate healing. Giving thanks is what brings salvation to the Samaritan. Giving thanks brings him eternal life through Jesus.

Each person, whether in the womb or already born, is endowed with the image and likeness of "God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." And so each of us is capable of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Each of us has received the precious gift of our life, body and soul, from God. When we receive any good gift we thank the person who gave it to us. And so it must be with God, because "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." (James 1:17) Our heavenly Father gives us every perfect gift: our life, what we have, the gospel and above all, the gift of His Son who comes to us in order to lead us to eternal life with Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit.

How can we thank God for all these gifts? We can do so in our personal prayer. We do so in how we treat one another and the earth which He created. The highest way we give thanks to God for all the gifts He gives us is right here, in this temple, every Sunday, besides the feast days and other weekday Liturgies. It is here at the Eucharistic Liturgy that we offer to God in unison our "thank you" to Him for the gift of all we have, all we are, and for the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. The very word "Eucharist" is Greek and means "to give thanks." The Divine Liturgy is our thanksgiving to God, our "thank you" for all He has done, continues to do and will do for us. And in saying "thank you" to the Father, he gives us His Son in Holy Communion by the power of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the Holy Spirit Himself that we may live in the three persons in one God. It is here, at the Eucharist, that we find the way to eternal life.

As we begin our one hundredth year as a parish we must realize that our parish exists for NO OTHER PURPOSE than the gaining of eternal life in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For this reason the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church is "what comes first," and all other activities, programs, dinners, fundraisers, etc., in the parish are to serve that goal: eternal life. If we are a people that worships God and gives thanks to Him then we will be filled with the Holy Spirit and by His light in us bring God's love into a suffering world.

We can hardly expect to be temples of the Holy Spirit if we do not regularly, faithfully come to this temple to worship and give thanks to God. We cannot find ourselves with those ten lepers who were so caught up in God's gift to them that they never came to give thanks to the giver of the gift. For us to grow as temples of the Holy Spirit, for us to grow as a parish, our first priority is regular, faithful worship of God not once a month or once a quarter or twice a year but every Sunday we are able to come and worship. And if we're out of town, find an Orthodox church to attend. And, if there isn't one or work or illness keeps us from Liturgy, keep the Lord's Day holy by praying in thanksgiving to God, commending "ourselves and each other and all our life to Christ our God."

By being a people who give thanks to God in community, here, in this temple, we will discover that God returns to us so much more than we can give to Him. Instead of slavery to sin and death, God gives us adoption as His children, that as He is we might be. Instead of the bread and wine we offer He gives us the Body and Blood of His Son. And rather than leave us orphans, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, making us living temples, living images of God that through the Holy Spirit of peace in us, a thousand souls around us may be saved. (St. Seraphim of Sarov) To the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit be all of our thanksgiving and worship forever.