

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Gospel: Saint Luke 17: 11-19

Temptations to impurity and how to overcome them

66.1 First Point

The ten lepers who presented themselves to Jesus Christ, as today's Gospel relates, are figures for us of temptations to impurity, because leprosy is a disease which makes the body unclean and corrupt.⁴²⁶ The manner in which Our Lord cured the lepers shows us the most sure remedies that we can use to be rid of this trouble. The Gospel reports that these lepers, seeing Jesus Christ from a distance, stopped and raised their voices, saying to him: Jesus, Master, have pity on us!⁴²⁷

The lepers kept their distance.⁴²⁸ This detail shows us how far removed impure persons are from Our Lord who, being purity itself, does not want to have any association with those who even to the least degree manifest this vice, just as lepers were not allowed to have any association with other Jews.

They cried out in a loud voice to beg Jesus Christ to have compassion on them. This reminds us of what Our Lord says in another place of the Gospel, that the first remedy for impurity and for the temptations that lead to it is to have recourse to prayer.⁴²⁹ These clamorous, insistent voices are a figure of the fervor and the insistence with which we should pray to obtain the cure of this infirmity.

According to the Wise Man, we cannot be pure unless God gives us the grace for it.⁴³⁰ So we cannot ask this of him too often nor with too much earnestness, because this malady is very dangerous and has very unfortunate consequences. If you sometimes feel tormented by impure thoughts, do not cease imploring God until you are completely delivered from them.

66.2 Second Point

The second remedy that the Gospel proposes and which Jesus Christ orders the lepers to use is to go show themselves to the priests.⁴³¹ The Old Law prescribed that when lepers were cleansed they should let the priests see them so that they could learn if the leprosy was indeed healed and, if it had been, these priests gave permission for them to associate with other Jews.⁴³²

But in the New Law the prescriptions of Jesus Christ have quite a different power than those given by Moses. For when Jesus Christ ordered the ten lepers to go and show themselves to the priests, they were cured of their shameful illness; they were perfectly cured while on their way.⁴³³

In a community, it is to our superiors that we should manifest our malady and make ourselves known just as we are. This is an effective means for obtaining a prompt cure. That is what Saint Dorotheus, a skilled master in guiding souls, says he experienced in his own case. He declares that the impure spirit fears nothing so much as to be exposed; when he has been discovered, he cannot harm us any more.

The saint adds that a soul finds security by the declaration it makes of all its inner dispositions; when the superior tells it, do that, or don't do it, this is good, or this is bad, the devil no longer finds an opening to penetrate the heart of the ailing soul. Its salvation lies in the care that it takes to be open with its superior and in acting in all things according to the superior's advice. Be faithful, then, to this practice, since it is so effective.

66.3 Third Point

In the Old Law, when lepers were cured, they were commanded to offer a sacrifice before associating with others, in order to purify themselves exteriorly of the legal impurity contracted by leprosy.⁴³⁴ This sacrifice is a symbol of the mortification that Jesus Christ recommends as a remedy for the lepers we are speaking about, those who are afflicted by the leprosy of impurity, or who are attacked by the impure devil. Jesus Christ even says that we cannot be completely cured of this infirmity nor entirely delivered from these temptations except through fasting,⁴³⁵ that is, mortification.

It is by this sacrifice that we offer God our body, to use an expression of Saint Paul, as a living victim, holy and acceptable to God.⁴³⁶ In fact, mortification procures for us this advantage, to make the body share in the life of the spirit, which made Saint Paul also say: If by the Spirit you mortify the flesh and all its actions, you will live. On the contrary, as the same Apostle adds, if you live according to the flesh, and if you give in to the flesh to satisfy its senses, you will die;⁴³⁷ in other words impurity, by making you die to the life of grace, will pervert your spirit and make it in some way wholly material, and your soul will become like that of animals.

Let mortification, then, be for you the perpetual sacrifice which was prescribed in the Old Law.⁴³⁸ Always carry about in your body, as Saint Paul says, the mortification of Jesus Christ, so that the life of Jesus Christ may also be revealed in your body.⁴³⁹ This is the admirable effect that this excellent sacrifice will produce in you.

426 Lv 13:45-46

427 Lk 17:12-13

428 Lv 13:46

429 Mk 9:29

430 Wis 8:21

431 Lk 17:14

432 See Lv 14:1-32

433 Lk 17:14

434 See Lv 14:10-20

435 Mk 9:29

436 Rom 12:1

437 Rom 8:13

438 See Lv 6:1ff

439 2 Cor 4:10