

Giving Thanks to Jesus

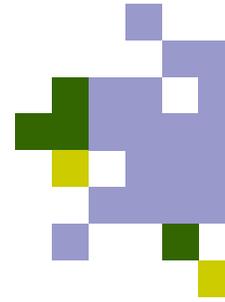
The third leg of repentance is thanksgiving for the healing and forgiveness that we have received. It is this leg that makes the stool of repentance complete and stable. It is this leg that raises us up from the pit of despair and allows us a glimpse of the world that is to come and the beginning of eternal joy.

Only one of the lepers did this, the Samaritan.

When we complete our repentance with this leg then and only then do we begin to realize the wonderful result of humility and love. Only then do we begin to understand what it means to be well, to be whole, to be forgiven. It is thanksgiving that completes the stool of repentance. A person who is truly repentant is also truly thankful and joyfully experiences the love of God.

Conclusion

The fathers of our faith tell us that only in the humble and broken heart is there room for love to abide and that humility comes only after a practice of continual repentance. But repentance is like the three legged stool—it must have all three legs to be stable and effective. Only when we truly confess our sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness and then sincerely thank Him for the healing that He gives will we be able to say with joy: “Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.” Thank you, Lord! Glory be to God for all things! Amen.



The Three Legged Stool

“Repentance is like the three legged stool—it must have all three legs to be stable and effective.”

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church
on the Sunday of the commemoration of
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by Fr. Nicholas Sorensen

†Gospel: Luke 17:12–19 (RSV)

At that time, as Jesus entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, “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. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus said, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

Introduction

The disease of leprosy is often used as an example of the spiritual disease of sin. And the healing of the 10 lepers in our text suggests some truths about the spiritual healing of sin through repentance.

When I was a young boy we often went to a dairy farm outside of my city. The farmer had a 3-legged stool that he used to milk the cows. One day one of the legs on the stool broke and the farmer crashed to the ground. He was not hurt . . . and I learned something—a three legged stool must have all three legs or it won’t work.

Humility and Love are the greatest virtues of the Orthodox and when present they indicate spiritual health. However, humility and love only come as a result of repentance, and this repentance has three distinct steps or legs. Each one is necessary to have true repentance and to finally reach true humility and love.

Our text illustrates each of these three legs or steps. Let’s see which of these ten lepers were able to sit securely on the stool of repentance and which crashed to the ground.

Admitting and Confessing Our Sins

The first leg of the stool of repentance is to admit our sin—to admit our disease and the pain it brings and then to desire to be

free of it. All ten lepers did this. They recognized that they were sick and admitted it to themselves and others.

But this leg of the stool of repentance also requires that we want to rid ourselves of this cancer—this sin. We know that we are not right and we want—we long—to be made whole. This step is painful and emotionally taxing. It is the pain of knowing what we are and what we should be.

However, if someone stops with only this leg of repentance the result is endless despair, despondency, and self-pity. The person is usually neither capable of experiencing love nor giving love. Humility and Love will never result from just admitting and confessing our sin and wanting to be healed.

The stool of repentance cannot stand on one leg.

Turning to the Mercy of Jesus

The second leg of the stool of repentance is to ask for help—for healing—for forgiveness. With this leg of our stool of repentance the person does seek a physician to heal his disease. The person turns to Jesus—the great physician—and cries out for healing. The person not only admits his disease but actively seeks a cure and help from a physician.

All ten of the lepers did this. They turned to Jesus and cried out for mercy. This was the best thing that they could do. The wonderful and miraculous result was that Jesus did have mercy on them and healed them.

When we recognize our sin and spiritual disease and cry out to Jesus to forgive us and heal us He always hears us and forgives us.

However, if we stop here we only have two legs of the stool of repentance and that stool will not yet stand or be stable. If we stop here the danger is that we will be trapped in a continual round of sorrow and tears over our sins and fervent cries for mercy, but no real experience of actual healing, or if anything only a shadowy and imperfect understanding of that healing. The result leaves us with very little or no joy of healing and consequently, no gratitude. Without the third leg of the stool of repentance we are healed but do not fully appreciate it. And our life is like the famous myth of Sisyphus (expand)—condemned to an endless repetition of sorrow over sin and cries for mercy, but with no sense of completion.