



# THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

## Father Alan's Blog

For the Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity - September 5, 2021

*"When Jesus saw them, He said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.'  
And as they went, they were cleansed."*

**St. Luke 17:14 (NIV)**

A large dog walks into a butcher shop carrying a purse in its mouth. He puts the purse down and sits in front of the meat case, whereupon the butcher jokingly asks:

*"What is it, boy? Want to buy some meat?"*

*"Woof!"*

barks the dog.

*"Hmm..."*

says the intrigued butcher,

*"What kind? Liver...bacon...steak...?"*

*"Woof!"*

interrupts the dog.

*"And how much steak? Half a pound...one pound...?"*

*“Woof!”*

The amazed butcher wraps up the one pound of steak and finds the money in the dog’s purse. As the dog leaves, the butcher decides to follow him. The dog enters an apartment house, climbs to the third floor, and begins scratching at a door. With that, the door swings open and an angry man starts shouting at the dog. The butcher tries to intervene:

*“Stop! That dog’s the most intelligent animal I’ve ever seen!”*

*“Intelligent?!?”*

snarls the man,

*“This is the third time this week that he’s forgotten his key.”*



To say the least, the angry man was anything but thankful. Contrast that with the story of a young woman who worked in the downtown core of a large city. Every morning, she encountered a heavysset middle-aged woman in a shabby coat who was soliciting spare change in front of an old brick church. The middle-aged woman greeted everyone with a smile and a pleasant:

*“Good morning!”*

The young woman nearly always gave her something. After almost a year of this routine, however, the middle-aged woman in the shabby coat disappeared. Over the next few months, the young woman wondered what had happened to her. Then one beautiful spring morning, the middle-aged woman was in front of the old brick church again still wearing the same shabby coat. From across the street, the young woman saw the middle-aged woman and delightedly crossed

over to her. As the young woman reached into her purse for the usual donation, the middle-aged woman stopped her and smilingly said:

*“Thank you so much for helping me all those days. You won’t see me again because I’ve managed to get a job.”*

And with that, the middle-aged woman reached into a large paper bag and handed the young woman a wrapped package. The middle-aged woman had been standing at her old spot waiting – not for a handout – but for the people she recognized, so that she could give each of them a doughnut. Now she – quite unlike the angry man in the first story – was truly thankful



Today’s Gospel Lesson (St. Luke 17:11-19) has much to teach us about “thankfulness”. However, during the past week, one particular point came to my mind while reading this passage of Holy Scripture:

☞ **Let us be thankful even when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances.**

Because I firmly believe this kind of thankfulness, above all, is born of, and demonstrates, “faith”. I also find that Christians all-too-often read St. Luke’s account of “Jesus’ Healing of the Ten Lepers” way too quickly and much too casually. So – owing to the much-appreciated help of Roman Catholic missionary, Deacon Pat Kearns – let’s take a few minutes and try to picture what was really happening that noteworthy day along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

As Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem for the final time, He meets ten men who are sufferers of the worst disease of their day, leprosy. Known today as “Hansen’s Disease”, it is caused by a type of bacteria called “mycobacterium leprae”, that multiplies extremely slowly. Specifically, its incubation period **can last up to 20 years**.

Moreover, the physical effects of leprosy alone are horrifying, as it primarily affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Hence, in many cases, the initial pain of leprosy gives way to something more terrible than that: a loss of sensation in nerve endings, leading to more damage – to more body parts – and leaving in its wake:

- **painful sores; and**
- **disfigured faces; and**
- **damaged limbs; and**
- **missing fingers and toes.**

In fact, leprosy can take 30 years to run its course, and, in that time span, entire limbs can simply fall off. Thus, leprosy was (and is), quite assuredly, a most hideous disease. Furthermore, it is difficult (if not impossible) to fathom exactly what it was like 2,000 years ago when medical treatment, as we know it today, was non-existent. Having said that, please allow me to quote Andy Cook, pastor of Shirley Hills Baptist Church in Warner Robbins, Georgia, to help give us an idea:

*“Beth Moore, in her book ‘Jesus the One and Only’, tells of an occasion she had to be near a modern-day leper colony. Something within her had always wanted to minister in a leper colony, but her trip overseas had given her the first opportunity to be near such a place. She walked by the entrance three times. She saw those who were suffering. She begged herself for a chance to go inside. But she could not.*

*The reason? The smell overwhelmed her. She could not work up the stomach to go inside the colony. She could not bear the thought of witnessing for the Lord, but at the same time becoming violently ill as she faced human beings already acutely aware that they were different. The trip passed, and she was not able to go inside.*

*In reading Beth Moore’s account, I gained a new appreciation of how bad this disease must have been in the days of Christ. It wasn’t just the grotesque damage, or the attack to our sight. It wasn’t just the*

*loud cries, the attack to our hearing. It was also the smell of rotting, decaying flesh, overwhelming even our sense of smell."*



To top it all off, the emotional pain of a leper must have been even worse than the physical pain, as the leper was immediately removed from his or her family and from his or her community. Indeed, for the leper, there could be no further contact with one's children or grandchildren. None whatsoever. A leper's spouse would not even have been allowed to kiss him or her "goodbye", as the afflicted would not have permitted it, for fear that the spouse would also become infected. Also, lepers tended to roam together, looking for food and begging for assistance (from a great distance, no less) thus, they learned to yell in loud voices, from the two-fold need:

- **to warn others to stay away; and**
- **to beg for help from across the "no-man's land" that separated them from the rest of Jewish society.**

What must it have been like, not only to have been removed from family and friends for a lifetime, but to have been forced to announce that removal **on a daily basis**? It must have been, in a word, **horrific** completely and utterly **horrific**. Yet in today's Gospel Lesson, as the ten lepers encounter Jesus (in verses 12-13), they stand at a distance and call out in loud voices filled with **hope**:

*"Jesus, Master, have pity on us."*

Or, in other words:

*"We want to be WELL."*

Please note: **these ten men had no hope until Jesus of Nazareth showed up in their lives.**

(For when there is no hope, whatsoever, to be found **anywhere on earth** – that is, from:

- ☞ **wealth;**
- ☞ **social status;**
- ☞ **power;**
- ☞ **fame;**
- ☞ **good looks;**
- ☞ **fellow human beings;**
- ☞ **medicine;**
- ☞ **science and technology;**
- ☞ **and so forth,**

**There is always hope to be found with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.)**

Therefore – and this cannot be stressed enough:

👤 **These ten guys were absolutely, unequivocally, hope-less until the day that they met Jesus Christ.**

At any rate, in response to their urgent request, the ten men hear Jesus say something (in verse 14b) seemingly **unexpected**:

*“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”*

Now, the local priest had duties other than making sacrifices and leading worship on each Sabbath. For example (as laid out in detail in Leviticus 13:1-46), the priest was also somewhat of a “health official”, meaning that if a person was somehow miraculously healed of any incurable sickness (in this case, leprosy), it was up to the priest to inspect that person’s body, checking for a complete removal of the disease and to announce the heretofore diseased person as “cleansed”. Only at that point, would it be lawful for that “now-clean” person:

- ☞ **to see his or her spouse again;**

- 👉 to hold his or her children again;
- 👉 to look for work again; and
- 👉 to part of society again.

Thus, once the priest gave the “OK”, that person would be “officially healed”.

Thus, when Jesus says to the ten lepers:

*“Go and show yourselves to the priests”,*

He is, in reality, urging the ten men to follow “normal procedure AFTER being cured”. So, even though they are still afflicted with the disease, the men obediently head off in search of the priests – **and on the way they are cleansed.**

Let’s not miss the point being made here:

- 👉 **For Jesus’ miraculous healing to occur, these men had to start walking in faith before their circumstances changed one iota.**

Could there possibly be a more potent lesson for us?

**We cannot put conditions on God!** And we cannot wait until the problems are over to start walking in faith.

In short, then:

- 👉 **We cannot pray, “Lord if You will just solve this issue in my family, I will start going to church.”**
- 👉 **We cannot petition, “Lord as soon as I have enough money in the bank, I will support Your work.”**
- 👉 **We cannot plea, “Lord if You will just heal my broken body, I will follow Your instructions for my life.”**

**Again, we cannot put conditions on God!** Instead, Almighty God places a demand for faith on us **before anything at all has changed.**

For instance, God just may say to us:

- † Love me despite the disease.
- † Obey me despite the lack of talent or the lack of resources.
- † Follow me now despite the depression.
- † Say no to the temptation while it still is difficult.
- † Praise me in the darkest of nights and in the worst of circumstances.

For this is the nature of our God – a God Who loves us so much, He will give us the opportunity to be thankful **when absolutely nothing about our circumstances gives us the motivation to be so inclined.** For that is the very definition of faith. More to the point, if we praised God only on the good days and only in the best of circumstances, it would not be faith at all. That would be more like a business arrangement, and as I have said many times in the past:

☞ **Faith, Christianity, this Mission, are not about BUSINESS!**



In 1996, while on a short-term missions trip, Jack Hinton, a Southern Baptist Pastor from New Bern, North Carolina, was leading worship at a leper colony on an island off the coast of the region of Tabango in the Philippines. Near the end of the service, there was time for one more song, so “Pastor Jack” asked if anyone had a request. A woman, who had been facing away from the pulpit for the entire service, suddenly turned around. Pastor Jack later admitted:

*“It was the most hideous face I had ever seen. The woman’s nose and ears were entirely gone. The disease had destroyed her lips, as well. She lifted a fingerless hand in the air and asked, ‘Can we sing, “Count Your Many Blessings”?’”*

Overcome with emotion, Pastor Hinton had to leave the sanctuary.



He was followed out by a team member who said:

*"Jack, I guess you'll never be able to sing that song again."*

*"Yes, I will,"*

Pastor Jack replied,

*"But I'll never sing it the same way."*



Some of us may be in horrible circumstances right now. And what may await some of us later today, or this week, will literally confront us with having to make the choice:

☞ **Will we be thankful, despite the difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves?**

In other words:

👍 **Will we be able, in all things, to earnestly "count our many blessings"?**

If so, like:

🙏 **the ten men in today's Gospel Lesson, or**  
🙏 **the woman at the Philippine leper colony,**

We will have visibly demonstrated:

† **true,**  
† **healing, and**  
† **lasting,**

FAITH.



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