

New Brighton, Sunday 22nd January 2023

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him. And behold, a leper came up and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if You will, You can make me clean.”¹

We will never achieve our journey to heaven without a long, good, repeated practice of the virtue of Humility. The Gospel we just read takes place just after the Sermon on the Mount Jesus delivered to his disciples at the very beginning of his public life. After teaching the good word of God, Jesus came down from the mountain to show the example. He is doing himself what he desires us to do: listening his teaching and put it into practice.

This example starts from the very moment Jesus stood up and came down from the mount. This simple movement is the way to follow for us. According to the mystical mean of the Holy Scripture, this movement of Jesus represent the humiliation God chose to endure for our redemption: from the hights of His divine Majesty, he came down upon earth, humiliating himself under the human nature, remaining Who He was, but receiving what He wasn't, as He took “the very nature of a servant. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross!”²

From the very first sentence of the Gospel, we just heard this morning, we can receive such a teaching from the action itself of Our Lord. Jesus invites us not to stay up above the miseries, because we supposedly found the way of holiness. At the very difference of what we could think initially, He recommends us to take with us this teaching, and put it into actions. Firstly by visiting our own miseries, humiliating ourselves, saying with St Therese of the Child Jesus:

“I am no longer surprised at anything, nor do I grieve at seeing that I am frailty itself; on the contrary I glory into it, and expect to discover new imperfections in myself each day. These lights concerning my nothingness do me more good, I affirm, than lights regarding faith.”³

The divine providence, always bending over our miseries, gave us in the same sentence of the Gospel the attitude we should follow when we discovered one of our miseries: “a leper came up and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if You will, You can make me clean.”⁴

As Jesus was coming down, a leper, moved to Him by the Faith of his heart, came to Jesus, bending the knee, prostrating his face down to the ground, adoring and praying the Lord. We can see gathered in this man three things Jesus will never say no: Faith, Humility and Prayer.

¹ Mt., VIII, 1-2; Gospel of the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

² Philipp., II, 7-8

³ St Therese of the Child Jesus, Story of a Soul, Ch. IX

⁴ Mt., VIII, 2

Prostrated to the ground, the leper, humiliated in the position, did not fear to unveil his wounds, and acting that way, deserved being answered and purified. We should imitate this example if we desire such a grace.⁵

Leper is known to us to devour the flesh of our bodies, with a terrible smell, and forcing to place ourself apart from the society, because of contagion. So is the sin, our infirmities, our defects for our spiritual life, but also for our community life. The leper of our soul makes us unable to climb that mount to hear properly the teaching of the Lord. We were unable, then the Lord came down in perfect humility, to teach us the same way of healing through that same virtue.

Now that we are clean, as the word of the Lord is powerful, and healing is happening at the very second it is said, what should we do? Should we go out and proclaim everywhere the wonders we received? Or should we hide ourselves in humility, and meditate in the silence of our heart the healing we received? Today Jesus himself recommended the following way to be acted:

“And Jesus said to him, See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a witness to them.”⁶

Jesus tells us today to escape from the honours and knowledge of the world, to not publish our good works. Following that way, we renounce not only material rewards, but also praises and advantages from men. This will help ourselves to not accept the temptation of vain glory, and give everything we received from the Lord, any gift, blessing, back to Whom they belong: Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Hope and our Salvation.

“I am a very little soul who can offer very little things to the good God; yet, it often happens that these little sacrifices which give such peace to the heart escape me; but that does not discourage me, I bear with having a little less peace and try to be more watchful another time.”⁷

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁵ Ludolph of Saxony, Life of Christ, Vol. 2, Chp. XLIs

⁶ Mt., VIII, 4

⁷ St Therese of the Child Jesus, Story of a Soul, Ch. X