

**THANK YOU FATHER DAMIEN**  
**Consecration Sunday –November 15, 2015 –Luke 17: 11-19**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

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Back to Father Damien at the leper colony. He went to heal and came down with the very disease he went to heal. He sought to heal the lepers of their leprosy but came down with the disease himself. As was written of him –“death from the most loathsome malady imagination can conceive of...death as the result of a long protracted period of corruption and decay –it calls for a spirit of a martyr to volunteer for a death like that.” (Damien the Leper, John Farrow, pp. 200-201) It was also noted that as he died, Father Damien’s bulbous pustules of leprosy disappeared; but that his leprosy entirely was gone. In his death he was restored as was the tenth leper. It puts me in a mind of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, Master and friend, Son of God, enters into our world in MERCY. He does not have to come. But out of His compassion He sees our leprosy, our fallen-ness, our ingratitude, and in love seeks to minister to us. As it says of Him –“*He who knew no sin, became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God.*” He came to the leper colony that is the world, and was willing to immerse Himself in our culture, and in a way where HE, too, might be tempted to become ungrateful, might be tempted to say to us –“You ingrates, I have died for you and you are not grateful for the blood shed on your behalf.” But this, of course, He did not do. Rather, “for the JOY that was set before Him, He went to the cross” for us and for our salvation. His was a profound gratitude to God, His Father. And the death He died for us, terrible in its own right, He died willingly and because He loves us. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on The Church of the Covenant.” And Jesus has. So now we have to hear His final question to the lepers.

He asks: “*Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?*” (Luke 17: 17) Did they not all receive mercy? So where are they today? Thank you, Jesus, for Giving your life to the Lord. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

**THANK YOU FATHER DAMIEN**  
**Consecration Sunday –November 15, 2015 –Luke 17: 11-19**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

Father Damien is the Roman Catholic priest who traveled to Molokai in Hawaii in the mid-1800's to minister to a leper colony there. He contracted the very disease he sought to eradicate. He died a premature death at age 49 of leprosy. His life and faith stand as a reminder of a profound gratitude to God that overcomes every other baser instinct in the soil of the human heart. I recently reread the book, *"Damien the Leper"*, by John Farrow, in preparation for this sermon on Gratitude, and expressing our Appreciation to the Lord Jesus for all the many mercies we receive in our life. I find just as I now need to explain to younger people what an LP stereo record is, I also now need to explain what reading a book is –It is like an extended Blog written for people with attention spans!

Our scripture from the Gospel of Luke is the familiar story of the Ten Lepers. Jesus is going on his way to Jerusalem and He is met by a group of ten lepers, who, as it says, *"stood at a distance"*. (Luke 17: 12) Of course they stood at a distance –under the law they were not allowed to come in contact with others who were non-leprous. Ritualistically they were "unclean" under the Old Testament law. They could not participate in Temple worship, could not associate with other good and pious Jews, they think a prophet like Jesus would have nothing to do with them. They cry out to Jesus the prayer of every true believer –*"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* (v. 13) The Church of the Covenant has received a great deal of mercy from the hand of Jesus over the past few years. I remember when I first came here the church was in utter turmoil, people were leaving, and people were afraid –*"We might be running upwards of a \$200,000 deficit"* some cried out to Jesus. The church was in danger of being just one more lovely building with a former great history that was empty and dying and like so many other empty and dying churches. It understood that nothing short of a miracle from the hand of God could save it. Its prayers were heartfelt and real. People pulled together, not apart. *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* we cried out. HE did have MERCY. But people have the ability to forget their blessings; we forget from whom they come. When times are bad or hard, people cry out to the Lord. But then after the Lord blesses them, they move on, forgetting from whom we received mercy; forgetting we are all just poor lepers, infected with the very human disease of ingratitude, forgetting that but for the MERCY of Jesus we are NOTHING, we possess NOTHING, we deserve NOTHING. That's why its called mercy.

Since this story from Jesus is about GRATITUDE then it must be that the metaphor He is using, the Ten Lepers, is also about GRATITUDE as well. So evidently, ingratitude is analogous to leprosy. It is inherently disfiguring. It "eats away at us" you might say. We were created in the image of God but being ungrateful destroys that image. We are to be daily transformed into the image of Christ by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, but a lack of GRATITUDE does the reverse –it takes away our features, it erodes the beauty of our soul filled with God, and the way we were created to be, and it becomes a foul leprosy which eats away at the human heart and destroys our ability to be with people, and to be in relationship with God. *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* the Ten Lepers cry out. And Jesus does have mercy on them. He tells them to go *"show yourselves to the priests."* (v. 14) They are obedient to Jesus; they do what Jesus says. Healing and health and wholeness always are byproducts of obedience, not disobedience, to God. Jesus tells them to do so because once the lepers are healed, and when they go to show the priests they have been healed by God, then and only then are they allowed to reenter society, to be with other people. Under the Old Testament Law when a leper is healed then they may reenter the Temple and reenter into the presence of God. So Jesus directs them to do so. *"And as they went they were cleansed."* (v. 14) But one of the lepers, just one of the ten, as he is going to show himself to the priest realizes something. He realizes that the priests have not healed him; he

realizes that JESUS has healed him. He is going to thank the wrong people; He needs to say to Jesus – “Thank you for giving to the Lord.” It is like saying “thank you” to our family at Thanksgiving for the meal, instead of saying “thank you” to the Lord God Almighty whose MERCY provided the meal. Don’t pray to ourselves this Thanksgiving; pray to God. So this one leper returns to Jesus, “*praising God with a loud voice*” (v. 15) and he fell on his face before Jesus giving JESUS THANKS. Now an interesting thing then occurs that we may miss in the biblical text. While the ten lepers were “*cleansed*” (v. 14) this one leper was “*healed*” (v. 15). The ten originally had the leprosy disease removed. But this one leper was restored, was made whole, the features on his face were remade, the vanishing digits on his hands were replaced; the sense of the word in the Greek is different. Ten were cleansed. But just one was totally completely made whole again. Ten receive mercy, but only the one who returns to Jesus to express his gratitude receives restoration. Returning to Jesus to express gratitude makes all the difference.

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