

*Celebrating Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019...*

**Thursday, 3 October 2019**

**Gospel: Mt 8:1-4**

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October is dedicated by Pope Francis as Extraordinary Missionary Month and reminds each of us that we are also 'Baptized and Sent.'

Today's Gospel passage, Mt. 8:1-4 is the follow up of the famous Sermon on the Mount, the Christian Manifesto proclaimed by Jesus. The passage opens saying, 'When Jesus came down from the mountain....' This indicates that it is the action which follows Jesus' words from the top of the mountain, or, in other words, it is how he walks his talk.

The incident narrates the healing of a leper. The very word healing will open up in our minds a lot of thoughts about the Signs and Gifts, especially the Gift of Healing and how it works in today's world. St. John the Evangelist calls these as Signs of the Kingdom of God. Church being the sacrament of Christ's presence in the world, assured by His promise of being with us today, we have to believe and see the signs of the Kingdom of God, even today.

Leprosy, a terrible disease, called for isolation of the leper from the society. Book of Leviticus, in the Old Testament (13:46), prescribed that. 'He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.' It is such a leper, who is outside the camp, in the outskirts of human settlements, who approaches Jesus seeking healing and empowerment. His prayer is full of faith, "Lord if you wish, you can make me clean." He knew the prescriptions very well, and that is the reason why he told Jesus to clean him somehow, but not necessarily by defiling himself by touching him. But Jesus chose the hard way. "He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I will do it. Be made clean.'" By touching him, Jesus knew very well, that he would be considered defiled as per the prescribed Law. But he went the extra mile and he accepted the man as a child of God and touches him and cleans him. The reason why Jesus asked him to show himself to the priests and do what was prescribed by Moses as offertory, was for the purpose of escaping himself from being considered unclean for touching a leper. Mark 1:45 mentions such an incident where the healed did not go to report to the priests and Jesus had to stay in the outskirts as a result. We do not know whether it is the same incident. Anyway that is beside the point. What matters is that Jesus did not want to abandon this man calling to Him and seeking healing.

What remains for us is to ponder over the generosity of Jesus and his reach even to the frontiers and outskirts. Christian life is itself a mission. It is a mission we live. Pope Francis reiterates in his address on June 9, 2019: "I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission." It is the conviction we ought to live. This mission challenges us how we reach out. It is what we keep out from our circle that Jesus is concerned. Jesus wants us to be His presence for everyone, wherever they stand at present, so that they also can come within our circle, within Jesus' fold.

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