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Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Homily at the Divine Liturgy on the Twelfth Sunday of Saint Luke



Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church

Flushing, New York

January 17, 2021

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

It is a great joy to be with you again, here in this dynamic community of Saint Nicholas, the largest parish in our Holy Archdiocese. This is a thriving church that has worked diligently to pass through this season of the pandemic with best practices in order to keep the life and education programs of the parish as vibrant as possible. You are all to be congratulated for your dedication and commitment to keeping the traditions of this wonderful community alive.

We currently find ourselves in the opening month of the 2021 New Year, when we are just beginning to witness the end of the pandemic through the expected success of the various vaccines that are being provided. But this is going to take

time, and not all of our fellow citizens are convinced of the efficacy of what is being proposed.

Thus, we can still identify with the ten lepers we read of in today's Gospel, as we have been crying out aloud to the Lord for months:

Ἰησοῦ ἐπιστάτα, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς! Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!

The lepers called out with the "Jesus Prayer," seeking healing and restoration to the community, because their leprosy was an automatic exile from the greater society. They had no one but each other, since they had been excommunicated from the commonwealth of Israel by their disease.

Indeed, all of us have felt isolated and occasionally excommunicated because of the pandemic! Even now, with an end coming into sight, we are struggling to keep our traditions and very way of life.

I can imagine that most of us have been praying the Jesus Prayer through these past months, to seek the mercy of the Lord in our affliction, in our bereavement, and from the various trials that have come our way.

Let us remember, though, that while the lepers, indeed, received healing, it was not immediately given to them. The Lord told them to fulfill the Mosaic Law and establish their healing by presenting themselves to the priests of the Temple. This, of course, was done in order to demonstrate their healing and reintegrate them into the life of the community.

Then, while they were walking toward Jerusalem, they realized that they had truly been healed. How exuberant and joyful they must have felt. And in that moment, as they grasped new possibilities for their lives, nine of them rushed to the Temple to reveal their healing. And only one returned to the Lord.

Even now, my beloved Christians, as we look with great hope and expectation to our healing from the conditions of the pandemic, let us remember these ten lepers.

There will be many who want to rush back to their lives as they knew them before the pandemic. Like the nine lepers running to the Temple in Jerusalem, they want a return to normalcy, to the everyday lives that they have missed so much during this time of disease.

But there was one who returned to the Master, the Divine Son of God Who heard his plea. This healed leper came back with gratitude, with unashamed adoration for God, and with deep reverence, falling on the ground at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

On seeing him, the Lord asked:

Οὐχὶ οἱ δέκα ἐκαθαρίσθησαν; Οἱ δὲ ἑννέα ποῦ;

Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?

Here, then, my beloved Christians, is the secret for our exit from the pandemic in the months ahead.

When things turn for the better and normality returns to our daily lives; When our churches and schools are open and free from restrictions;

When we can gather as families and friends and enjoy the pleasures of life that we have forgone in the pandemic;

Let us not be in such a rush to return to business as usual. Let us not be like the nine, who though they were healed in body, were still self-centered in soul.

Let us not forget to turn in our hearts to the God Who heals us from sin and from death, and give Him thanks. Let us be like the one who returned – grateful, with praise, and with worship.

Let us also turn back and lean upon the Lord our God, Who is merciful and hears our prayers.

Let us recognize that we have come through “fire and water” as Scripture says – διὰ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος.

Let us be mindful of all the lessons we have learned – lessons of charity toward one another, understanding, patience, and generosity with those less fortunate.

Let us remember the God Who saves us, and ascribe all glory and might, and dominion unto Him:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, praised and glorified unto the ages of ages. Amen.