

Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity; Luke 17:11-19

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

THE TEN LEPERS

I. THE PORTRAYAL OF THE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OR CHARACTER.

1. St. Luke excels the other Evangelists in that he not only describes Christ's work and doctrine like they, but also observes the order of his journeys and circuits. His Gospel to the thirteenth chapter shows how Christ began at Capernaum to preach and do wonders, whither he moved from Nazareth and where he made his home, so that Capernaum is called his city in the Gospel. From there he went out everywhere, into cities and villages, preaching and working miracles. After he had accomplished all his work and had preached over the whole country, he prepared to go up to Jerusalem. This journey to Jerusalem he describes from the end of the ninth chapter to the close of his Gospel, how Christ during this journey preached and worked miracles. For this is Christ's last journey, and was finished in his last year at the close of his life. This is what he means here when he says: "And it came to pass, as they were on the way to Jerusalem, that he was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee." That is to say, this miracle he performed during his last journey to Jerusalem.

2. Now this was not the direct road from Capernaum to Jerusalem. For Galilee is north of Jerusalem, and Samaria is south of Galilee, and Capernaum is in Galilee. The Evangelist with special pains desires to show that he did not journey on the usual road, as he mentions Samaria and Galilee, and adds that he went through between them, and not across their borders the nearest way. Christ journeyed from Capernaum eastward to the Jordan and southward from Galilee to Jerusalem, which was a tiresome, far and circuitous route, in doing which he took his own leisure and time. For he did not journey thus for his own sake, but in order to preach as much as possible and be of service to many. Therefore he journeyed on the borders of these lands to appear publicly, that people might come to him from all sides to hear him and obtain his help. For he was sent to offer his services to every one, that all might freely enjoy his favor and grace. Thus the Evangelist now describes the miracle and says: "And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, who stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

3. One might ask the Evangelist how these lepers could stand afar off and lift up their voices, as lepers could not as a rule speak loud, and therefore they had to make a noise by rattling or clapping something? Of course he would answer they did not stand a mile away, only that they were not as near to him as those following him; and that all lepers are not so entirely voiceless that they cannot be heard even at a distance. However, the Evangelist, according to the custom of Holy Writ, desires hereby to indicate the great earnestness of their desire, that the voice of their heart was great that

compelled them to cry out bodily as loud as they could.

4. This entire Gospel, however, is a plain, simple history or transaction, which requires little explanation. Yet as plain as it is, great is the example it presents to us. In the leper it teaches us faith, in Christ it teaches us love. Now, as I have often said, faith and love constitute the whole character of the Christian. Faith receives, love gives. Faith brings man to God, love brings man to his fellow. Through faith he permits God to do him good, through love he does good to his brother man. For whoever believes has every thing from God, and is happy and rich. Therefore he needs henceforth nothing more, but all he lives and does, he orders for the good and benefit of his neighbour, and through love he does to his neighbour as God did to him through faith. Thus he reaps good from above through faith, and gives good below through love. Against this kind of life work-righteous persons with their merits and good works terribly contend for they do works only to serve themselves, they live only unto themselves, and do good without faith. These two principles, faith and love, we will now consider as they appear in the lepers and in Christ.

5. In the first place it is a characteristic of faith to presume to trust God's grace, and it forms a bright vision and refuge in God, doubting nothing it thinks God will have regard for his faith, and not forsake it. For where there is no such vision and confidence, there is no true faith, and there is also no true prayer nor any seeking after God. But where it exists it makes man bold and anxious freely to bring his troubles unto God, and earnestly to pray for help.

6. Therefore it is not enough for you to believe there is a God, and pray many words as the wretched custom now is. But observe here in the leper how faith is constituted, how without any teacher at all it teaches us how our prayers may be truly fruitful. You here observe how they had a good opinion of and a comforting assurance in Christ, and firmly thought he would be gracious to them. This thought made them bold and anxious to bring their troubles to him, and to cry for help with great earnestness and a loud voice. For if they had not previously possessed this fancy and expectation, they would undoubtedly have remained at home, or would not have gone forth to meet him, nor would they with raised voices have cried to him, but their doubt would have advised them thus: What shall we do? Who knows whether he would like to have us ask him? Perhaps he will not notice us!

7. O such wavering and doubt offer sluggish prayers, it does not raise the voice nor go forward to meet Christ! It indeed murmurs many words and chants many songs very unwillingly. But it does not pray, and only desires first to be sure it will be heard, which is nothing else than to tempt God. But true faith does not doubt the good and gracious will of God. Wherefore its prayer is strong and firm like faith itself. St. Luke does not relate three things of them in vain; first, that they went to meet him; second, they stood; third, they lifted up their voices. By these three things their strong faith is commended and presented to us as an example.

8. The going forth to meet him is the boldness excited by comforting assurance. The standing is the firmness and sincerity against doubt. The lifting up the voice is the great earnestness in prayer, growing out of such confidence. But powerless doubt does not go forth, nor stand, nor call, but turns and twists and hangs the head, grasps it in the hands, opens the mouth wide and stammers forth

perpetually: Who knows? Who knows? If it were certain? How if it would fail? and similar faint-hearted expressions. For it has no favorable conception or thought of God, expects nothing of him, and hence will receive nothing, as James says, 1, 6-7: "But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting; for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Afterwards they come like the foolish virgins who spilt their oil, with their empty lamps, that is with their works, and think God should hear them knock and open to them. But he will not.

9. Behold this good inclination or comforting trust, or free presumption toward God, or whatever you may call it, in the Scriptures is called Christian faith and a good conscience, which man must have if he desires to be saved. But it is not obtained by human works and precepts, as we shall see in this example, and without such a heart no work is good. Therefore be on your guard, there are many lecturers who want to teach faith and conscience, and know less about them than a common blockhead. They think it is a sleepy, lazy thing in the soul, that it is enough for the heart to believe that God is God. But here you observe what a thoroughly living and powerful thing faith is. It creates wholly a new heart, a new man, who expects all grace from God. Therefore it urges to walk, to stand, makes bold to cry and pray in every time of trouble.

10. The second characteristic of faith is that it does not desire to know, nor first to be assured whether it is worthy of grace and will be heard, like the doubters, who grasp after God and tempt him. Just as a blind man runs against a wall, so they also plunge against God, and would first gladly feel and be assured that he can not escape out of their hands. The Epistle to the Hebrews says, 11, 1: "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." This clearly means faith holds fast to what it does not see, feel or experience, either in body or soul, but as it has firm trust in God it commits itself to and relies upon it without any doubt but its hope will be realized. Thus it will also certainly be realized, and the feeling and experience will come to it unsought and unsolicited, even in and through such hope or faith.

11. For tell me, who had given these lepers a letter and seal that Christ would hear them? Where is there any experience and feeling of his grace? Where is the information, knowledge or certainty of his goodness? Nothing of the kind is here. What then is here? A free resignation and joyful venture on his imperceptible, untried and unknown goodness. Here there is no trace in which they might discover what he would do, but his mere goodness alone is kept in view, which fills them with such courage and venture to believe he would not forsake them. Whence, however, did they receive such knowledge of his goodness, for they must have known of it before, be they ever so inexperienced and insensible of it? Without doubt from the good reports and words they had heard about him, which they had never yet experienced. For God's goodness must be proclaimed through his Word, and thus we must build upon it untried and inexperienced, as will hereafter appear.

12. The third characteristic of faith is, that it allows of no merit, will not purchase the grace of God with works, like the doubters and hypocrites do, but brings with it pure unworthiness, clings to and depends wholly on the mere unmerited favor of God, for faith will not tolerate works and merit in its company, so entirely does it surrender, venture and raise itself into the goodness for which it hopes, that for its sake it cannot consider either good works or merit. Yea, it sees that this goodness

is so great, that all good works compared with it are nothing but sin. Therefore it finds only unworthiness in self, that it is more worthy of wrath than of grace; and it does this without any dissimulation, for he sees how in reality and in truth it cannot be otherwise.

13. These lepers here prove this clearly, who hope for the grace of Christ without the least merit. What good had they ever done to him before? They had never seen him, how then could they have served him? Besides they were lepers, whom he could justly have avoided according to the law, Levit. 13, and kept himself free from them as was just and right. For in reality and truth there was unworthiness, and reason why he should have nothing to do with them nor they with him. For this cause they also stand far off, like those who well knew their unworthiness. Thus faith also stands far from God, and yet it goes to meet him and cries out, for it knows itself in the reality of truth to be unworthy of his goodness, and has nothing on which to depend, except his highly renowned and loudly praised goodness. And such a soul also seeks Christ's favor, while it stands far off and is empty; for it cannot in the least tolerate in its company our merit and work, and comes freely like Christ into this village to the lepers, in order that its praise may be free and pure.

14. Observe how everything agrees perfectly that God's love gives its favor freely, does not take nor seek anything for it, and how faith also receives quite freely and pays nothing for it, and thus the rich and the poor meet together, as the Psalms say, To this their words also testify when they say: Have mercy on us! He who seeks mercy of course neither buys nor sells anything, but seeks pure grace and mercy, as one unworthy of it, and evidently having greatly deserved the contrary.

15. Behold, here is a good, real, living and true example of Christian faith, that sufficiently teaches us how we must be disposed if we would find grace, piety and salvation. Now, in addition to this doctrine follows the incentive or inducement to faith, that we should gladly believe as we are at present taught to believe. This incentive, however, consists in that we observe how such faith never fails, that as it believes so it comes to pass, and that it is certainly heard and answered. For Luke describes how graciously and willingly Christ beheld and heard the lepers, and says: "And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go and show yourselves unto the priests."

16. How very friendly and lovingly the Lord invites all hearts to himself in this example, and stirs them to believe in him! For there is no doubt that he desires to do for all what he here does for these lepers, if we only freely surrender ourselves to him for all his favor and grace. Just as true faith and a Christian heart should do and delight to do; so these lepers also do and teach us to do. For how earnestly the Lord desires that we should joyfully and freely venture to build on his favor before we experience or feel it, he has here sufficiently testified that he hears them willingly, without any hesitation, that he does not first say he will do it, but as though it were already done, he did as they wished. For he does not say: Yes, I will have mercy on you, ye shall be cleansed; but merely: "Go and show yourselves unto the priests." As though he would say: There is no use of asking, your faith has already acquired and obtained it, before you began to ask; you were already cleansed in my sight when you began to expect such things of me; it is no longer necessary, only go and show your purity to the priests; as I consider you and as you believe, so you are and shall be. For he would not have sent them to the priests, if he had not considered them clean, and so wished to deal thus with them, as those who had become cleansed.

17. Behold, so powerful is faith, to obtain all it wants of God, that God considers it done before the asking. Of this Isaiah says, 65, 24: "And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Not as though faith or we were worthy of it, but in order that he might show his unspeakable goodness and willing grace, thereby to stir us to believe in him, and comfortingly look to him for every good thing, with joyful and unwavering consciences, which do not stumble after him nor tempt him. So now you also see that Christ hears these lepers before they call, and before they cry out he is prepared to do all their hearts desire. "Go," he says, I will not add a word, for it has succeeded in your case farther, no promise or consent is necessary; take what you ask and go. Are not these strong incentives that make the heart joyful and eager? Behold, then his grace permits itself to be felt and grasped, yea it grasps and satisfies us. This has been said on the first part, namely, faith.

18. Now we must also examine the other part of this example of the nature of Christianity, love. The lepers have instructed us how to believe; Christ teaches us to love. Love does to our neighbour as it sees Christ has done to us, as he says in John 13, 15: "For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." And immediately afterwards he says in verse 34: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." What else does this mean than to say: Through me in faith you now have everything that I am and have: I am your own, you are now rich and satisfied through me; for all I do and love I do and love not for my but only for your sake, and I only think how to be useful and helpful to you, and accomplish whatever you need and should have. Therefore consider this example, to do to each other as I have done to you, and only consider how to be useful to your neighbour, and do what is useful and necessary for him. Your faith has enough in my love and grace; so your love shall also give enough to others.

19. Behold, this is a Christian life, and in brief it does not need much doctrine nor many books, it is wholly contained in faith and love. Thus also says St. Paul, Gal. 6, 2: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ." And to the Phil. 2, 4 he says: "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." And there he gives us Christ as an example, v. 6: "Who existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped." Who, although he was true God, yet became our servant and served us, and died a scandalous death for us. This Christian, free and joyful life has the evil spirit as its enemy, who with nothing else does such great injury as with the doctrines of men, as we shall hear. For truly the manner of Christian's life; is briefly marked out in the words, have good heart toward God and a good will toward your fellow man, here it consists entirely within us.

20. His good heart and faith naturally teach him how to pray. Yea, what is such faith, but pure prayer? It continually looks for divine grace, and if it looks for it, it also desires it with all the heart. And this desire is really the true prayer, that Christ teaches and God requires, which also obtains and accomplishes all things. And because it does not trust or seek comfort in self, its works or worthiness, but builds upon God's pure grace, therefore whatever he believes, desires, hopes and prays, also comes to pass; so that the holy Prophet Zechariah justly calls the Spirit a Spirit of grace and of prayer, where God says, Zech. 12, 10: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication." Because faith recognizes and

desires God's favor without any intermission.

21. Again, love naturally teaches him how to do good works. For they alone are good works which serve your neighbour and are good. Yea, what is such love but only good deeds continually shown toward your neighbour, so that our work is called love, our faith is called prayer? Thus Christ speaks in John 15, 12-13: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." As though he would say: So completely have I done all my works for your benefit, that I also gave my life for you, which is the greatest of all love, that is, the greatest work of love. If I had known a greater love, I would have manifested it to and for you. Therefore you should also love each other, and do all good deeds to one another. I require no more of you. I do not say you are to build for me churches, make pilgrimages, fast, sing, become monks or priests, or that you are to enter into this order or rank; but you do my will and service when you do good to each other, and no one cares for himself but for others, on this all entirely depends.

22. And these he calls "friends." By this he does not mean that we should not love our enemies. For he says clearly: "Who lays down his life for his friends." "His friends" are more than mere "friends." It may come to pass that you are my friend, and yet I am not your friend, or I may love you and receive you as a friend and offer you my friendship, and yet you may hate me and remain my enemy. Just as Christ says to Judas in the garden: "Friend do that for which thou art come."

Mat. 27,50. Judas was his friend, but Christ was Judas' enemy, for Judas considered him his enemy and hated him. Christ loved Judas and esteemed him as his friend. It must be a free, perfect love and kindness toward every one.

23. See, this is what James means when he says, 2, 26: "Faith apart from works is dead." For as the body without the soul is dead, so is faith without works. Not that faith is in man and does not work, which is impossible. For faith is a living, active thing. But in order that men may not deceive themselves and think they have faith when they have not, they are to examine their works, whether they also love their neighbours and do good to them. If they do this, it is a sign that they have the true faith. If they do not do this, they only have the sound of faith, and it is with them as the one who sees himself in the glass and when he leaves it and sees himself no more, but sees other things, forgets the face in the glass, as James says in his first chapter, verses 23-24.

[This passage in James, deceivers and blind masters have spun out so far, that they have demolished faith and established only works, as though righteousness and salvation did not rest on faith, but on our works. To this great darkness they afterwards added still more, and taught only good works which are no benefit to your neighbour, as fasting, repeating many prayers, observing festival days; not to eat meat, butter, eggs and milk; to build churches, cloisters, chapels, altars; to institute masses, vigils, hours; to wear gray, white and black clothes; to be spiritual; and innumerable things of the same kind, from which no man has any benefit or enjoyment; all which God condemns, and that justly. But St. James means that a Christian life is nothing but faith and love. Love is only being kind and useful to all men, to friends and enemies. And where faith is right, it also certainly loves, and does to another in love as Christ did to him in faith. Thus everyone should beware lest he has in his heart a dream and fancy instead of faith, and thus deceives himself. This he will not learn

anywhere as well as in doing the works of love. As Christ also gives the same sign and says: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13, 35.

Therefore St. James means to say: Beware, if your life is not in the service of others, and you live for yourself, and care nothing for your neighbour, then your faith is certainly nothing; for it does not do what Christ has done for him. Yea, he does not believe that Christ has done good to him, or he would not omit to do good to his neighbour.

This St. Paul also requires, 1 Cor. 13, 2: "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." This explains the whole matter, not that faith is insufficient to make us pious, but that a Christian life must embrace and never separate these two, faith and love. But the presumptuous undertake to separate them, they want only to believe and not to love, they despise their neighbour, and yet pretend to have Christ. This is false and must fail. Thus we say, too, that faith is everything and it saves us, that a man needs no more for his salvation. Yet he is on this account not idle, but labours much, all however for the benefit of his neighbour, and not for himself; for he does not need it, he has enough in Christ. If, however, he does not do this, he is, certainly not right. And this his work is his love. But the blind guides want to teach that works are necessary, that the worker needs them for his salvation. This is the chief perversion, the error of all errors, for by this they destroy both faith and love, the entire Christian nature and example. They take the work from the neighbour, and give it to the person himself doing it, as though he needed it. Here faith cannot live, for he knows that his work is not necessary and helpful for himself, but only for his neighbour. Thus they are opposed to each other; faith casts the works from itself on the neighbour through love; but the blind teachers tear them from the neighbour, and apply them to their own persons, and thus choke and dampen both love and faith, and cause man only to love himself and to seek only his own salvation and trust in his own works. From this evil must follow dull consciences and much self-chosen work, building churches, much praying, the saints' fasting and the like, which are beneficial to no one, and all misery and misfortune must follow, as is at present evident in the cloisters, monasteries and high schools.]

24. Now let us observe the works of the love of Christ in this example of the ten lepers. But what is in Christ besides pure love? Everyone can easily find out for himself. First, why is it necessary for him to travel between Samaria and Galilee? Or who paid him anything for doing this? Or who requested him to do so? Is it not manifest, that he does all this freely, willingly, without receiving anything for it, and comes of himself uninvited, that no one can say that he deserved such a visitation or acquired it by prayer. Thus we see here that he does nothing whatever for himself or for his own sake, but all for the sake of others, unrequested and altogether freely, out of mere grace and love.

25. In like manner, that he had just gone into this village, why did he need to do this? Who asked him to do so? Who paid him anything for it? Is it not true that he came before any merit was possible, any prayer could be said; and offers his love and kindness freely and gratuitously, and seeks nothing of his own in it but only serves others thereby, so that he might draw all hearts unto himself to believe in him? Behold, such virtue has love, that it does only good and lives for the benefit of others, seeks nothing with selfish motives, does all freely and gratuitously, and surprises everyone. Such life and work you must observe and direct your life accordingly, if you would be a Christian, and banish all such works and power from your view that are not of this nature, even if they be so great as to remove mountains, like the Apostle says, I Cor. 13, 2.

26. Note in the second place how Christ does good without harm to others, yea, by preventing harm to others. For there are some who do good in a way that is harmful to others, as the proverb runs, they offer our lady a penny and steal her horse. So they who give alms from ill-gotten goods, as God says in Is. 61, 8: "For I, Jehovah, love justice, I hate robbery for burnt offering." Of this nature are nearly all monasteries and cloisters that devour the sweat and blood of the people, and then pay God with masses, vigils, rosaries, or monasteries and holidays, and at times they also give an alm. This is to love with the goods of others, and to serve God in prosperous days and in the fullness of wealth with an all sufficiency. This disgraceful welldoing is indeed a far reaching plague. But here Christ does no one harm, but prevents injury rather, and directs the lepers to the priests, so that they may be deprived of none of their rights.

27. Thus he bestows his kind deeds upon the lepers, as though he went into this village for this purpose; he looks upon them graciously and willingly, and gladly helps them. Besides he thereby also prevents any disadvantage to the priests, although he is under no obligation to them. For as he cleansed the lepers in a supernatural manner without the priests doing anything, he was indeed not obliged to direct them to them, and could say: Inasmuch as you have not performed your office toward these according to the law, therefore you should also not have the emoluments of the office, which is just and right. But love does not look on what is right nor does it contend, it is present only to do good, and so it does even more than it is obliged to do, and goes beyond what is right. Therefore St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 6, 1, that among Christians there should be no lawsuits at court, because love does not seek or demand its rights, nor cares anything for them, but is bent only on doing good. Although he says at another place, I Cor. 13, 1: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." Thus are truly the learned of our day, who teach much about rights, which is only unchristian and opposed to love. I do not speak of those who are forced to contend for their rights; for as right is preferred by some unchristian people, they must be present and defend the right so that nothing worse occurs. It is not Christian, to hang or to crush under the wheel; but in order to restrain murderers, such things must also be done. It is not Christian to eat and drink, nevertheless man is compelled to do both. These are all necessary works, which do not concern the inner nature of Christianity. Therefore a person should not be satisfied in doing them, as though the doing of them made a Christian. The work in the married state is not distinctively Christian, yet it is necessary to avoid evil. Other examples might be given.

28. Thirdly, Christ shows love is still greater, in that he exercises it where it is lost and receives ingratitude from the majority; ten lepers were cleansed and only one thanks him, on the nine his love is lost. If he would have made use of justice here instead of love, as men are accustomed to do and nature teaches, he would have made them all lepers again. But he lets them go and enjoy his love and kind deed, although they return to him enmity instead of thanks. Nor did he prevent the priests from enjoying their own, but gave them their honour and rights, although without any need and obligation to do so. And the priests thank Christ by alienating from him the lepers, so that they believed Christ did not cleanse them, but their offering and obedience to the law did it. And thus they destroy the faith in the lepers, and cause Christ to be despised and hated by them, as though he had taken to himself an office that did not belong to him.

29. That the priests had examined these lepers one may readily believe, and this the text also

suggests. Therefore they must have trumpeted into these lepers many wicked words against Christ, and highly praised the works and offerings of the law, so that they might root out of them their great and noble faith, and establish themselves in place of Christ in their heart. And the lepers accepted this, and regarded Christ as the priests told them, so that they became his enemies, and ascribed their purification to God as obtained by virtue of their offerings and merit, and not by Christ and his pure grace. And while they were thus released from bodily leprosy, they thereby fell into spiritual leprosy, which is a thousand times worse. But Christ permits both parties to go and enjoy his goodness, is silent about his rights, receives hatred and displeasure for praise and thanks; that we may hereby learn how we often pray, and that it were better for us if our prayers were not answered. It would have been better for these lepers if they had remained unclean than that by their bodily cleansing they should become diseased with a more dangerous spiritual leprosy.

30. Now study this example and incite your life that you may do your good works not only without harm to others, but also to their advantage, and not only to friends and the good, but consider that the greater portion will be lost, and that you will receive ingratitude and hatred as your reward. Then you will walk the right road in the footprints of Christ your Lord. Until you have accomplished this, you should not regard yourself a true, perfect Christian, it matters not whether you wear ten hairy shirts and fast every day, or celebrate mass every day, and pray the psalter, make pilgrimages, and establish churches or yearly festivals. For Christ wishes to have such works done, if they are done in the right spirit. Behold, this is truly a Christian life.

But now you see whither Christ's works tend. Therefore attend to this with all diligence, and view your own life aright. If you find a work of yours, which you need or think you need for your salvation, stamp it under your feet, guard yourself as in the presence of all the devils, and never rest until you are delivered from such a spirit or work, and strive that your life may be useful and serviceable not to your, but only to your neighbour's need. Cursed be he who lives and works only for himself, for Christ did not wish to do his own will nor live for himself! For your own works will certainly lead you away from love and faith. You have no other work that is necessary and useful for thy salvation than to believe, and daily to exercise yourself in this faith, and see to it that you continue steadfast in it, and not allow the priests to deprive you of it, as they did these nine lepers, for they have slick tongues and a beautiful color. Only let all other works go in one bundle, be they lost or well applied, let that not trouble you; you remain in the faith Christ gives you, here you have many times enough; and in love, which gives you to your neighbour, you will have enough to do, for which you will find yourself many times deficient. For what you do in this is nothing, even if you should possess all the works of the saints. Hear what St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 13, 3: "And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." It is not enough to help the poor and torment yourself, you must love your enemy and cast your goods with yourself into the waste heap, and not choose one rather than another to whom to do good. Here you might say: Alas, what will now become of the spiritual orders, the priests, the monks and the nuns? Are they of service to no one, and do they perform only their own works? Answer: Why do you ask about priests and monks? Has not Christ ordered you to follow him, and not priests and monks? If their works are not done in the sense before mentioned, that one should serve the other and cling to faith, you are never to doubt that they are opposed to Christ, and are as the foolish virgins with their empty, dark lamps. For their sake another Christ will not come. Of this St. Peter prophesies, 2 Pet. 2, 1: "There shall be false teachers among you, they will bring forth destructive sects," that is, spiritual orders and ranks, in which souls will only be condemned. And St.

Paul, in 2 Thess. 2, 10-11: "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." In these words the spiritual orders and ranks are set forth, how they are constituted and whence they come. For they pretend to be something extraordinary and better than other callings and stations in the Christian life, while they are farther from the Christian life than any other calling or any other people on earth, and need more to bring them to the true Christian life. Some of these callings and their governments are well ordered, for there are wife and child and subject, who exercise and give occasion for love, and likewise insist that you must not live or work for yourself, but are compelled to work only for the good of others. If you only know the faith and really live according to it, you then have no work of your own and you will have so much to do that you will be obliged to forget your own work. For in that you fast, labour, eat, drink, sleep, take a wife, in short do everything for the needs of your body and estate, is all done that you may live here and support the body in order that you may serve others. Behold, this is truly a Christian life. Therefore St. Paul says, in Rom. 13, 8: "Owe no man anything, save to love one another," and in love to serve each other. From this you may know why all the world is full of spiritual orders, that is, dens of hell and murder, but no one knows any longer what a Christian life is, not to mention that one should find an example of it. This is all the fault of the Pope and his cursed law, which has given us God's wrath for our masters, as St. Peter and St. Paul have declared.]

This is enough on the first part of our Gospel, let us now examine its second part. The Evangelist says:

II. A PICTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IN ITS DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH.

"And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed."

31. Thus far we have learned how faith works, its nature, whence it comes, what its beginning is, what it brings, and how acceptable it is before God. All this is said of the beginning of a Christian life. But it is not enough to begin, we must increase and continue steadfast, for Christ says, Mat. 24, 13: "But he that endureth to the end shall be saved." And Luke 9, 62: "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Therefore this second part treats of the increase and perfection of faith.

32. The faith or confidence of the heart in God is a very tender and sensitive thing indeed, and it may very easily be injured, so that it begins to tremble and despair, when it is scarcely yet exercised and established. And thus it has countless attacks and dangers from sin, from nature, from reason and self-conceit, from human doctrine, from the examples of the saints and from devils. In short, it is attacked without intermission from all sides, in front and in the rear, so that it trembles and despairs, or falls to trusting in good works. Hence St. Peter truly says, I Pet. 4, 18: "The righteous is scarcely saved." And the Prophet Zechariah compares the righteous to a brand plucked from the fire, that he may not be entirely consumed; and Amos the Prophet to a sheep's ear that the shepherd delivered from the jaws of the wolf. So malignantly temptations rage about a believing heart. Therefore St. Paul says to the Corinthians, I Cor. 10, 12: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." And in all places he teaches how we should walk with watchfulness

and fear, and always take good care of our faith, for, as he says in 2 Cor. 4, 7: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," which are very easily broken if God does not preserve us.

33. Therefore we should not be secure but stand in the fear of God and pray with Jeremiah, 17, 17, that God might protect our faith, and not permit us to tremble or be frightened in the presence of our faith. This Gospel also sufficiently shows this danger by a terrible example, that among these ten lepers who believed, nine fell away, and in the end only one stands and continues steadfast. It is here as with a beautiful tree in full bloom, that we think cannot bear all its fruit; but later so many blossoms are destroyed by storms, the fruit becomes worm eaten and falls, that scarcely one tenth of it ripens. So there are many who receive the Word and begin to believe; but as the Lord says, Mat. 13, 10-21, the soil is stony and not deep enough, or faith stands among thorns and thistles; that is, by reason of temptations and enticements they fall and continue not steadfast. For as soon as things go wrong with them and God afflicts them, they forget his goodness and see only his anger. Hence faith vanishes, and there remains a wavering, discouraged and frightened conscience, that flees from God, not to mention that it should go to meet him, as indeed it did at first.

34. Thus we see here that the lepers began to believe, and expected help from Christ, who then further awakens their faith and tries it, does not immediately make them well, but speaks a word to them, to show themselves to the priests. If there had been no faith in them their reason and natural fancy would have spoken thus and immediately murmured: What is this? we expected great kindness from him, and heartily believed in him, that he would help us; but now he does not touch us, as is his custom, and as he did to others, but only looks at us and passes on. Perhaps he despises us, besides he neither promises nor denies whether he will cleanse us or not, but leaves us in doubt, and says no more than that we should show ourselves to the priests. Why should we show ourselves to them, they already know we are lepers? We see that nature would thus become angry and lukewarm against him, because he does not immediately do her bidding, and he does not with certainty tell what he will do. But here is faith, that strengthens itself and only increases through such temptation, and cares naught how unkind or uncertain the actions and words of Christ sound, but clings fast to his goodness, and does not permit itself to be frightened away. And of a truth, there was in them a strong, rich faith, that upon his word they promptly went forth; for had they doubted they certainly would not have gone, and yet they had here no clear promise.

35. And this is the method God employs with us all to strengthen and prove our faith, and he treats us so that we know not what he will do with us. This he does for the reason, that man is to commend himself to him and rely on his mere goodness, and not doubt that he will give what we desire or something better. So also these lepers thought: Very well, we will go as he commands, and although he does not tell us whether he will cleanse us or not, this shall not influence us to esteem him any the less than before. Yea, we will only esteem him so much the more and higher, and joyfully wait, if he will not cleanse us, he will do still better for us than if we were cleansed, and we will not on that account despair of mercy and favor. Behold, this is the true increase of faith.

36. Such trials continue as long as we live, therefore we must also continue to grow just as long. For when he tries us in one instance in which he makes us uncertain how he will treat us, he afterwards always takes another and continually enlarges our faith and confidence, if we only remain

unmovably steadfast. Behold, this is what St. Peter calls growth in Christ when he says, 1 Pet. 2, 2: "As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation." Again in the latter part of 2 Peter, verse 18: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." And St. Paul in all places desires we should increase, continue and become rich in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. This is nothing else than in this manner to become strong in faith, when God conceals his kindness and appears as Christ does here to the lepers, so that we do not know what to expect of him. For faith must be (*argumentum non apparentium*) an argument not an appearance, and be certain and not doubt in the things that are concealed and are not experienced. Heb. 11, 1.

37. Therefore observe that when God appears to be farthest away he is nearest. This word of Christ reads as though we cannot know what he will do, he does not refuse nor promise anything, so that the lepers, who previously certainly relied on his kindness for all things, might have become offended at it, and begun to doubt, and taken quite a different sense of it than Christ meant. Christ speaks it out of an overflowing kindness that he thinks it unnecessary to tell them that they have already obtained what they want. But as the sense was not clear to them they might have thought he was entirely of a different opinion, and farther from them than before.

38. Thus are all his superabundant kindnesses, works and words, that we may think that he was previously more kind and gracious than afterwards, when he first had anything to do with us. Thus it also happened to the people of Israel in the desert, they thought God did not bring them out of Egypt, upon whom nevertheless they called and they knew while in Egypt that he would help them. But all this is done that we may not remain in weakness when we first begin to believe, but grow and ever increase until we be able to take the strong nourishment and become satisfied and full of the Spirit, that we may not only despise and triumph over riches, honour and friends, but also over death and hell.

39. Hence it is with the faithless and unbelieving as with unfortunate mine workers, who begin to prospect with great confidence, and dig extensively. But when they are about to strike the treasure, which would have taken but a little more labour, they give up, and look at what they did as in vain, and think, there is nothing in it. Then comes another worthy of the task, who had never yet made a beginning, but he strikes away boldly and finds what the former hunted and dug for him. Thus it is also with the grace of God; he who begins to believe and will not continually grow and increase, from him grace will be taken and given to another who begins with it; if he, too, will not continue it will be taken also from him and given to another. It only wants to be believed. And here our high schools speak wholly blind, mad, and poisonous things about faith, when they teach that the beginning of faith is enough for salvation, and is only a small degree or step from it.

40. So these words of the text, "And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed," would say: It is impossible for faith to fail, it must take place as it believes. For if these lepers had not believed and remained steadfast, of course they would not have gone. Therefore, not for the sake of their going, but on account of their faith they became cleansed, because of which they also went.

41. All this I say in order that some blind teacher may not come to this text and stick his eyes into good works without seeing the faith; and afterwards pretend that works make us acceptable and save us, because these lepers went forth and thus became cleansed. This error must be opposed, that one may rightly see the faith of these lepers, and thus it will appear that their work of going did not obtain the cleansing, but faith did. [So also the Lord opposes the same error in that he cleanses them before they accomplish the work assigned them. For he did not only command them to go, but to show themselves to the priests. Now they evidently became cleansed before they arrived at the priests and before they had finished the work. If they had first become cleansed after they had arrived and brought the offering, the priests might have had ground for the pretense that they were cleansed by their offering and works, as they even did, and misled the poor people.

42. Now I have often said that works are twofold; some before and without faith, others come out of and after faith. For as little as nature without faith can be idle and inactive, so much less also can faith be idle. And as nature's works do not precede or make nature, but nature must first be present and do the works out of and by virtue of herself; so also the works of faith do not make faith, but they follow and spring from faith. So there must be works, but they have no merit nor saving power, but all salvation and merit must first be present in faith.

43. This is also the reason that the works of faith are free and spontaneous, and not premeditated. For these lepers were also free, and if Christ had commanded them to do something else, they would have done it. And if they had been asked whether they went in order to be cleansed, they would have replied, no. This must have been so, if the cleansing took place because of their works. Just as if you should ask the hypocrites whether they work in order to be saved, they would say: Yes, and without works they would not want to be saved. [But these lepers would not speak thus, they hope he will cleanse them out of pure kindness, without considering their work of going, which they do only because he wills it to satisfy the law, although unnecessary. For all lepers might also go to the priests, and yet they would not on that account be cleansed, which nevertheless must be, if the work were necessary and useful for the cleansing. Just as the work-righteous persons think, that he who works will be saved; so it must also be here, he who goes will be cleansed. But now as the cleansing takes place only because of the presence of faith, so salvation comes also on account of faith alone.] But as the lepers must go not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the priests, that they might be satisfied, although they were not obliged to go to them; so all believers must work, not for their own sake, but for the sake of others, to serve them. Although they owe them nothing, but freely do good as Christ has done to them, about which enough has been said above in the first part. "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, with a loud voice glorifying God."

44. The returning of one must have taken place after he and the others had shown themselves to the priests. But the Evangelist is silent as to how they came to the priests and what took place there. However, from the return and thankfulness of this one, he gives us to understand how it went. He without doubt very unwillingly returned alone, for as with all his heart he thanks Christ and is kind to him, the conclusion is clear how he persevered, admonished, urged, prayed and did his utmost for the others that they should go with him and acknowledge the great kindness; and no doubt it grieved him that he could not prevail upon the nine and had to leave them with tears and grief. All these and similar things force us to think of the love he had for Christ, that leaves nothing unattempted, fears no one, regards no one, if they only worthily honour and praise Christ.

45. What kind of a tempest visited the nine, that they so firmly separated from the one; as we have heard they all made a good beginning and grew in the faith of Christ? Of their own accord they would not have fallen so completely; some one must have first overthrown their faith, so that the honour which they previously gave Christ so freely and honestly, they now divert from him and rob him of this honour, and turn their friendship into enmity. Nor was it a weak falling away, that so severely offends and opposes the one leper with all his admonitions and regrets. Behold, the priests did this, they could not bear that the honour be given to Christ; hence they no doubt preached a strong sermon against him to root out their faith.

46. But what might they have said to them? Because they fought against Christ and the faith it is easy to think what they said and did, namely, what is contrary to faith; that is, they heralded into these poor lepers that they should not believe that Christ cleansed them, but should thank God, who had regard to their offering and the prayers of the priests, and heard them, and on this account cleansed them; and whatever else they said to draw away the hearts of the lepers. But the one leper did not permit himself to be drawn from Christ; he remained steadfast and overcame all the assaults of faith.

47. Therefore with two strong assaults their hearts were changed. First, to cleanse one from leprosy is impossible for a creature, and it is certainly only the work of God, therefore it cannot be in any way attributed to Christ, whom they saw and regarded as a man and not as God; therefore they should beware by no means to blaspheme God, and make a god out of a mere creature. O what a fine pretence and powerful stroke this was! What a great faith must be there to stand, when it is opposed by God himself, by his honour and work, with which one is threatened not to deny God! What heart does not think, that it would be the very best to yield to a temptation like this?

48. The next stroke was to bring forth the law of Moses, where it was commanded to hearken unto the priests at the risk of death, what they judged according to the law, Deut. 17, 12. As the priests here judged the cleansing was from God and not from Christ, they powerfully caught their consciences, and crushed faith to powder in the nine, for to act against the law, is also to act against God.

49. Here observe what a terrible opposition this was, when bodily and eternal death is placed in opposition to the conscience, together with the anger of God and man, the highest and greatest sins, with the greatest punishment. What heart would not fall before such terrors, or never tremble, especially when the law of God is offered as the signal of truth? With this these nine fell, and had sooner denied ten Christs than offend God and transgress the Law, and thought they did well by doing so.

50. Then an ugly contention arose first of all concerning the one, who alone stood opposed to the priests; while all his companions fall and join his opponents. Then they also exercised diligence, prayed and threatened, that he should by no means offend God, believe the priests, nor despise the law of Moses, and beware that he be not put to death as a blasphemer. Here the poor child must be a fool or insensible, so good he has it, or a heretic and apostate; he has become cleansed, but he must on that account risk body and life, goods and honour, friends and companions; and besides had to

allow them the name that they were pious, did good and honoured God, while he must be a sinner and dishonours God. And because he was a Samaritan they esteemed him perhaps the less, and thought: Let him go, he is but a Samaritan, a man lost and not of Israel; or they had mercy on him, as a man mad and possessed. See, this is the last and greatest opposition to faith. But he who continues steadfast, abides indeed forever, for here is overcome the fear of death and hell with all their terrors, in this world and in the world to come.

51. Thus the name of God must at all times do the greatest evil and be a cover for the greatest scandal through its misuse by the devil and wicked men. For as they know that man does not fear and honour anything so much as God's name and glory, especially among good hearted people; therefore they take just such a one and bring him to their mind, that what they pretend is God; then the poor crowd follows that thinks nothing else than that a man must fear and accept all this, by which God's name or Word is presented. Therefore an extensive knowledge is necessary in such opposition, that a man may not err, although he be threatened by the name of God. For idols have even assumed the name and honour of God. Thus the Pope always employs the name of God for every sin and shame, and all his disciples and false teachers follow him, and especially the priests who pretend that their unchristian, unbelieving orders and works are divine and Christian.

52. But it is still harder when the evil spirit torments the conscience in the throes of death, and pretends God is angry and does not care for you; of this David says, Ps. 3, 2: "Many there are that say of my soul, There is no help for him in God." Or as the Jews spoke to Christ while on the cross, Mat. 27, 43: "He trusted on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God." As though they would say: "It is impossible for God to help him, he is wholly lost."

53. Or when God himself thus tries and forsakes a man, so that he feels nothing else in his conscience than that God has forsaken him, and will never welcome him, as David says, Ps. 31, 23: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes." This also tempted Abraham, Gen. 15, 12; and Jacob, Gen. 32, 24. Here faith suffers its greatest distress, and is in the pangs of hell. Here it is necessary to hold fast and not suffer yourself to err, when God himself is pictured before you. Behold, this is the last and greatest trial of faith; he who remains firm here abides firm forever, for here is overcome the fear of death and hell with all the terrors in this world and the world to come. They are the strongest Christians and the greatest spirits, who resist this temptation.

54. All this I say that we may learn to hold fast to faith, in which we have begun, and ever remain in the same firm conviction that looks to God for every good thing, and not permit ourselves to be forced or driven from it by man, the devil, sin, the law, the name of God or God himself, which we will be able to do if we only abide in the true nature of faith, as St. Paul says, Heb. 11, 1: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen;" but not the substance of things fleeing away, nor the evidence of things seen; that is, the nature of faith is, that it relies on the goodness of God and thinks of nothing else than to hope for and desire it. The contrary of this is to flee from it, which is terrible, and that is not an example of faith, but of assault and temptation; for God has not built our faith or good conscience, or confidence on wrath, but on grace, therefore all his promises are lovely and gracious; on the contrary his threats are terrible and bitter, which we must also believe; but on his threats Christian faith cannot build, it must have before it only that

which is good.

55. Secondly, man should possess assurance. The good for which faith looks and on which it depends, must not be seen or experienced. Therefore everything a person feels, whether of pleasure or pain, he must know it is not that which he is to believe, but it is the opposition and temptation, over which he must leap and jump, close his eyes and all his senses, and cling only to the good which he neither sees nor hears, until the contention ceases. Just as Elijah wrapped his face in a mantle, when the great earthquake, wind and fire passed by.

56. The blows and assaults against this leper were much greater, besides he was left alone; but he stood firm. So far is his faith greater and more perfect, and was quite ripe. Without doubt it is an example for us, that we, too, may not permit ourselves to be influenced by like priests and saints, even though the great crowd of all the world go with them. It was indeed a great sight, that the priests withstood him, whose duty it was to teach other people the right way, and who should by rights have been the most learned.

57. And here we learn a good answer for the Pope, the priests and the wise, when they appear with their power, government, office and dignity, and pretend that we must believe them, and only hear what they say; who know well enough what it is, when Christ directs the lepers to the priests, but appear as though they could not see how this lonely man, who was not a priest but a common layman, nor was he even an Israelite, but a Samaritan, and yet he pronounces judgment on the priests' doctrine and opinion, and is more learned than they all put together; nor does he worry about being alone, and the crowd being on their side. Now, if this had been sufficient, as our Papists say, that they are the priests, the learned, the rulers and the power, and besides they have the multitude with them, and that a man should not oppose what the government, dignity, power and multitude offer, then this Samaritan did what was not right. But God preserve us! For this Gospel here teaches that scarcely no one is so accustomed to err and go astray as just these very priests, the clergy, the most learned, the rulers, the most dignified and the greatest crowd, wherefore we are scarcely to avoid any one more than just these very ones.

58. But since Christ directs the lepers to the priests, he gives them to understand it is not their office, but the misuse of their office that is to be avoided, and draws the line how far we are to believe and follow them, namely, when they teach according to the law we are to hear them, as Moses, Deut. 17, 11, 12, clearly declares, that the priests shall judge according to the law, and then, whoever will not hear is to be stoned; but when they without law offer their own doctrine, we shall regard neither their office nor power, and abide alone with the Scriptures. Of course the people say, that no one writes false things except the scribe; so no one preaches false doctrine except the preachers; and again as the common saying runs: The learned are the perverted! If then the priests who are placed in their offices by divine order to teach God's Law, often and most grievously err; what shall our popes, cardinals and bishops do, who are not placed in their offices by God nor man, but by themselves, who neither preach nor study, and produce nothing but human doctrine and their own dreams? Therefore neither their office nor doctrine is any good here, they are nothing but error from head to foot, that is only to be avoided, for little of their doctrine and character is subject to controversy; for they are not the priests referred to here, as we shall hear.

59. But why does St. Luke say that this single person saw that he was cleansed; did not the others see it too, as all ten were surely cleansed? So the nine, as we have heard, with the priests, also praised God, and held him in high esteem, so that they would not give the honour to Christ as to a creature; why then does he say that this one only greatly praised God with a loud voice?

60. In the first place this is said by Luke according to a general custom, as when one says of the unthankful: he does not see the kindness done him; that is, he will not see it nor take it to heart, nor think that he ought to be thankful, but acts as though he knew nothing about it, he despises it and regards it not. Thus these nine did not want to see and consider the kindness of Christ, and despised him as though he did nothing for them. On the contrary he who is thankful will and cannot forget, and does not cease to recognize and acknowledge his benefactor and kindness. With such eyes did this Samaritan see his cleansing.

61. On the other hand, the nine also praised God, but with their tongues, and at the same time blasphemed him in Christ. It would not have been punishable, if even at that time they had not regarded Christ as God; for he was not, yet glorified, as St. John says,

7, 39. And this one also, perhaps, still held him as a mere man. But they wanted Christ to be looked upon as a sinful man and a blasphemer, and to be regarded with the utmost contempt. Such was the poison they brewed into the nine. Christ at that time sought nothing more than that they should receive him as sent to them from God, and that they should believe that God dwelt, spoke and worked in him. This they did not wish, and would not allow others to receive him thus; but he was to be looked upon as coming from the devil, and speaking and working through the devils. And such faith the nine permitted to be driven into them. But this one remained firm in spite of them, that God must be with Christ, who spoke, worked and dwelt through and in him. Therefore his praise and thanks are mentioned and the praise of the others ignored. Through what strife and opposition he remained in his faith, we have heard above. It was a great faith that held so firmly to him who was despised, condemned and blasphemed by the priests, the learned, the rulers, the best, the greatest and the largest number among all the people. Who dare thus hold Christ at present, when the Pope, the bishops, doctors, monks, priests, princes, with all their host, have condemned him, and issued a bull against him, as we see they publicly do?

62. And here this Gospel teaches what works tried and experienced faith produces, and what is the true worship and honour man may give to God. Some build churches for him, some arrange masses, some ring bells for him, some light candles for him that he may see; and act no differently than as though he were a child, who is in need of our gifts and services. Although the building of churches and holding of masses at first arose from the Christians coming together to conduct the true worship; afterwards the same worship disappeared and was entirely omitted. Since then we have continued to cling to charitable foundations, buildings, singing, ringing, lighting, clothing, smoking, and as many more such preparations as there are for worship, that we have come to consider such preparations as the chief divine worship, and know nothing of any other. And we do wisely, as he who, builds a house and spends all his money on the scaffolding, and during his whole life should get no further, not even to lay a single stone for the foundation. Pray tell, where will he dwell at last, when the scaffolding is torn down?

63. But the true worship is to return and praise God with a loud voice. This is our greatest work in heaven and on earth, besides it is the only worship we may bring to God; for he needs none of the other kind, and is not capable for it: he will be only loved and praised by us. Concerning this Psalm 50, 12-14 speaks: "For the world is mine and the fullness thereof. Offer unto God the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High." Do you think God would drink the blood of goats, or eat the flesh of bulls? Thus he might also say now to the founders of charitable institutions, smokers, singers, ringers and candle lighters: Do you think that I am blind and deaf, or that I have no house for shelter? You shall love and praise me, this is the incense you are to burn to me and the bells you are to ring for me.

64. The returning means, to bring home again to God the grace and goods received, not to keep them, not to boast of them or exalt self above others, or praise self on their account, not to reap honour thereby nor wish to be better than others, not to be satisfied with self, not to have joy in them, but to have all such joy, pleasure, honour and praise, only in him who has given them, and stand there willing and quite composed, when he shall again take them from you, and none the less just then to love and praise him. O how few there are who thus return, of course scarcely one among ten. If one has more beautiful hair than another, he delights in himself because of it above others; what then will he do with the great gifts of reason, spirit, etc.? These are the ravens of Noah that flew out of the ark, and did not return, Gen. 8, 7. To sum up all: To return embraces these two thoughts: not to cling to God's gifts, but only to himself, who gives them.

65. Thus the great praise of God includes two parts - The first is to esteem him highly in the heart, and to have a lovely disposition toward him, so that we taste and experience how sweet the Lord is, of which St. Peter speaks, 1 Pet. 2,3, and Psalm 34,8: "O taste and see that Jehovah is good." All this faith, that has been tried, teaches and brings us at the end of the conflict. For as long as the strife and conflict endure, faith is in labour, and all is painful and bitter, it experiences and tastes no sweetness in God. But as soon as the evil hour is past, if we persevere and remain firm, then the sweetness of God will be ours. God will become so lovely, satisfactory and sweet to the heart, that it will desire nothing more than to battle and to seek to try his faith, and now as it were thirsts and longs for suffering and misfortune, which all the world fears, and which he also himself previously feared, of which Psalm 26, 2 speaks: "Examine me, O Jehovah, and prove me; try my heart and my mind." Out of this valiant faith comes quite a different man with a different taste, so that henceforth he does not feel well without suffering, and as it were lives contrary to all the world, so that he rejoices where the world mourns, and mourns where the world rejoices, until he becomes an enemy of this whole life and becomes eager for death.

66. This is what St. Paul means when he says, Gal. 6, 14: "Through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world." That is, my joy and life are the suffering and death of the world, and her joy and life are my suffering and death. Therefore he says again, Phil. 1, 23: "Having the desire to depart and be with Christ." To this taste and knowledge no hypocrite can come, for conflict and suffering they do not want, and so they must remain faithless and wholly inexperienced in spiritual things.

67. The other part is to break forth with the voice, and to, confess before the world what the heart

within believes of God. This is nothing else than to bring down upon one's self the enmity of the world, and to send many messengers after death and the cross. For he who would praise and honour God with his voice, must condemn all the praise and honour of the world and say that all the works and words of man are nothing, with all the honour they have from them, and that God's work and Word alone are worthy of praise and honour. But you see that the world cannot tolerate this, and so you must bear the brunt and be a heretic, a deceiver, a blasphemer, while you promise many good works and a spiritual life in all your divine services. Then they will command your silence, or make it hot for you. And it is not possible for them to suffer it from you, for their pet affairs they will not allow you to reject. So is it also impossible for you to cease and be still, but with loud voice like this leper you rather confess God's praise and honour alone in his works and words; and thus you then go to pieces and become ashes. Then the Pope goes to work and enlarges his almanac with red ink, and makes them saints in heaven, and blots you out of the book of life, and casts you four thousand miles on the other side of hell, and you are now a rotten member cut off from holy Christendom, that you may not infect the holy church with the poison of your foul odor and your satanic doctrines.

68. Christ speaks of this in Mat. 24, 9: "Ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake." Why for my name's sake? They would and might not tolerate the name, praise and honour of God, for then they and their whole cause would be put to shame. And if God alone were wise, good, just, faithful and strong, then they would be fools, wicked, unjust, liars, false and impotent. Who would bear this great injustice, the devilish heresy, that so much divine service and godly life should for God's sake be abolished and changed as a foolish, unjust, false and impotent thing? Not so, it must not be God, but the devil who pretends this. Behold, upon the highways all the prophets are murdered and Christ himself. The world does not want to be a fool nor to be unjust. But God will not suffer this from it, and hence he sends his messengers to punish it. And thus the saints must then shed their blood on account of it. Therefore it is a great act to praise God and to raise a free and loud voice before the world.

69. However, the false saints and murderers of Christ also now praise and extol with a loud voice God and his works, yea, they preach and cry more about God than the true saints do. As we even now see every corner full of preachers, who highly extol and praise God, that he alone is worthy of praise and honour, and use the very same voice and Word which the true preachers use. Why then is it not valid? Or what is the matter with it? Without doubt nothing else than that they with this leper do not fall down at the feet of Christ to thank him, but want Christ to fall down at their feet and thank them. For the Jews give all honour to God, but of Christ they will know nothing. So it is with these; as long as we leave their cause alone and do not reject it they cry and praise us very highly. But if one also judges them by their doctrine, and their own cry falls upon them, that they are nothing and their whole cause nothing but falsehood and foolishness; then their praise and cry are gone, and their false heart breaks forth and is revealed, so that they praise and honour God only with the mouth and themselves with the heart.

70. It is not enough that you loudly call and cry that God does all things and our work is nothing; you must also suffer such things to be said of you and your affairs. You can agree that Christ's and your enemy is nothing, and all he does is rejected, and you think it is right and well done; for his cause is not from God, but against God. But you do not wish to be rejected with him. Your cause is to be God himself and unrejected; how then is it possible that you should tolerate the rejected Christ,

not to mention falling at his feet and regarding yourself as unworthy, when with him you would be rejected? Now as God has concealed himself in the despised man Christ, and will dwell there, you must not undertake to find him anywhere else, except in contempt; yea, you must reach the point to rejoice that you are found worthy to be despised, and must also fall at his feet and thank him for the contempt, which will not suffer your cause to be anything, so that it be not words but deeds; that you say: God alone is to be praised and not man, such instruction is first to be proved by you, you suffer such things just for the sake of his doctrine, and you consider yourself unworthy of all this.

71. Thus Christ also taught the same and praised God's name alone; and also suffered first and most of all, that he became as nothing, so that no one can be compared to him in this. O this is a rich, great example, of which much might be said. But now it is sufficient that we may see a little how great a cause it is to prove God's praise by our actions, and fall upon our faces at the feet of Christ, the man despised; as the Apostles were glad, Acts 5, 4, that they were worthy to suffer dishonour for the ' Name, of which it is said, Ps. 72, 9, that the enemies of Christ are to bow before him, and lick the dust from his footprints. That is as St. Paul also says, they shall boast in his sufferings and cross, that shall come upon them on account of the praise of God and the punishment of men. For as Christ himself thus suffered, suffering has become so precious that no one is worthy of it, and it is to be regarded and esteemed as great grace.

72. From this we see how far a Christian life is above the natural life. First, it despises self; secondly, it loves and thirsts for contempt; thirdly, it punishes everything that is unwilling to be despised, by which it resigns itself to all misfortune; fourthly it is also despised and persecuted on account of such contempt and punishment; fifthly, it does not think itself worthy to suffer such persecution. Now from the very first part the world and nature flee, when then will they come to the last? But there is still another and a greater behind it, concerning the falling at the feet of Christ, which the priests neither understand nor want; for not every faith is sufficient for it, but the faith of Christ must be there, that truly humiliates us. Of this we will treat later under the spiritual interpretation. "And he was a Samaritan."

73. Why was it necessary for the Evangelist to write, rather than something else, that this one leper was a Samaritan? By this he opens our eyes and warns us that God has two kinds of people who serve him. One, that has the appearance and name of having a great, spiritual, holy life, is employed almost wholly in it, and yet it is all in vain. They are nothing more than ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. Yet they have the honour of it, and are regarded by every one as the true worshipers of God; therefore goods, honour, friendship flow to them, and everything the world has, for God's sake; for they think he is there, and he who thinks differently is worse than a heathen, heretic and an apostate.

74. The others are without any show and name, yea, they are of the opposite appearance, as though no one were less God's people than they, and in short, they are thorough Samaritans; a word that sounds as badly among the Jews, as if at present you should revile one as a Turk, Jew, heathen or heretic. For the Jews alone had the name of being God's people, and they alone had God and his worship for themselves in preference to all other people on the earth. And they hated the Samaritans above all nations, for they too claimed to be God's people along with the Jews; therefore a

Samaritan was to them as an apostate Christian is among us. And although it be true that the Samaritans did not rightly believe, and that the Jews had the true law of God, it was according to human custom that they boasted alone of Judaism and despised the Samaritans, who were less Jews and worse Samaritans, than the natural Samaritans. But now, as God loves the truth and is an enemy of hypocrisy with all its boasting, he turns it round and accepts the Samaritans and lets the Jews go. Thus it occurs that they are not his people who still have the name, the appearance and honour of his people. Again, those who are his people and have the name and appearance, are heretics, apostates and the devil's children.

75. So it is even at the present time. The clergy, priests and monks call themselves and are regarded as the servants of God, and no one is a Christian who does not believe as they believe, whereas no one is less a Christian and God's people than just those who thus turn up and boast themselves among them. Again, those whom they hold are heretics, many of whom they have also burned and exiled, like John Huss and his followers they dare not be Christians, although they alone are the true Christians. Here then this Gospel is so powerful that no one returns, no one exalts God with a loud voice, no one falls on his face at the feet of Christ, except the Samaritans, the despised, the condemned, the accursed, who must be heretics, apostates, errorists and Satan's own children. Therefore let us guard against everything that makes only a show, it certainly is deceiving; and let us not reject what does not make a display, so that we do not go and reject Christ and God, as the Jews did. This Christ also desires when he says: "And Jesus answering said, Were not the ten cleansed? but where are the nine? Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?"

76. The stranger does it, he sincerely gives God all the glory. O, what a terrible example is this! Among ten only one, and he among the least and most worthless. How entirely does God indeed overlook that which is great, wise, spiritual and honourable! And yet such people have no fear, but become hardened and petrified in their nature. It is also terrible that the Lord knows ten of them were cleansed, of this they did not think. To it he is not silent, he inquires after and seeks them: Where are the nine? O, what a frightful thing it will be when they at some future time will feel this inquiry and must answer whither they went, that they did not give God the glory. Then they will say: Well, we have nevertheless praised and thanked God, and thus our priests have taught us! Then it will appear whether it will help us to follow the doctrines of men in the name of God, and to forsake the doctrine and will of God. We are sufficiently warned in the Gospel, therefore no excuse will help us if we allow ourselves to be deceived. In Baptism we have all vowed to follow Christ and his doctrine; no one has vowed to follow the Pope, the bishops and clergy. Thus Christ has thoroughly rejected and forbidden the doctrines of men.

77. However, Christ here comforts his poor Samaritans, who for his name's sake must risk their lives with the priests and Jews, and strengthens their hope with the sentence and judgment that he demands the nine and judges them as God's thieves, who steal God's glory, and justifies the Samaritan. For this hope gives them strong courage, that their cause before God will be rightly maintained and will stand, but the opposite cause will be condemned and will not stand, it matters not how great they were and what right they had on earth.

78. Therefore observe, before Christ justifies the Samaritan, he judges the nine, that we should be certain not to hasten or desire revenge, but leave it only to him, and go our way. For he is in himself so careful to defend the right and punish the wrong, that he first takes up the latter before he rewards his Samaritans.

79. Besides, he uses many more words in this sentence than to the Samaritan; so that we see how greatly he is concerned about it, and he by no means forgets their wrongs and our rights. Nor does he wait long to have them accused before him, but of his own free will summons them, so that without doubt the cause of the unbelievers influences him more and sooner than it strikes or harms us. Of this God speaks in Moses, Deut. 32, 35: "Vengeance is mine, and recompense." And St. Paul says to the Romans, 12, 19: "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath." Now the words which the Lord says to the Samaritan, when he adjusts his affairs, are the following: "And he said unto him, Arise, and go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."

80. Behold, is not this a wonderful expression, that he attributes his cleansing to faith? This is opposed to the judgment of the priests who told the nine that their offering and obedience to the law had cleansed them. But Christ's judgment stands and triumphs, that they were not cleansed because they went to the priests, nor because of their offering, but alone on account of their faith. Therefore, as said above, faith will not tolerate any work, that it should help man to be justified and saved. For this faith more than all other things must and will do it alone, and he employs his works elsewhere, namely, to help his neighbour, as Christ has helped him.

81. And in conclusion we observe that this Gospel sufficiently teaches and represents the entire Christian life with all its events and sufferings; for the two chief things are faith and love. Faith receives the good; love gives the good. Faith offers us God as our own; love gives us to our neighbour as his own. Now when such life begins, God goes to work and improves it by trials and conflicts, through which a man increases more and more in faith and love, that through his own experience God becomes to him so heartily dear and precious, and he no longer fears anything. Then hope grows which is certain that God will not forsake her, of which St. Paul speaks, Rom. 5, 3-5: "We also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope; and hope putteth not to shame." And Paul always treats of these three principles in his Epistles. To the Colossians he speaks thus,

1, 3-5: "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have toward all the saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens." And still more beautiful he says to the Thessalonians, 1, 2, 3: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father."

82. How beautifully he divides the three principles, that faith goes forth in trusting, love in labouring, and hope in patience and suffering. As though he would say: Your faith is not a dream nor a fancy, but it is life and action; and your love is not passive nor is it idle, but it serves well for your neighbour. All this takes place in prosperous days, while your hope is exercised in suffering and patience, and all this in Christ; for there is no faith, nor love, nor hope outside of Christ, as I said

above. Thus a Christian life goes through good and evil until the end, and yet it does not seek revenge, and only grows more and more in faith, love and hope.

83. And love, which naturally follows faith, is divided into two parts: it loves God, who does so much for her through Christ in faith; it loves its neighbour, and does to him, as God does to her. Therefore, all the works of such a man go to his neighbour for God's sake who loved him, and he does no work relating to God except to love and to praise, and he confesses this freely before the world. For God does not need other works. Thus, all worship is with the mouth; although that is also called a service of God which is done to our neighbour. But I speak now only of the service rendered to God, in which the one part man can take is to love and to praise; but in this he must resign himself wholly and entirely in all adversity. Behold, what more would you know as to how to be a Christian? Have faith and love, continue in these, then you have and can do all things; the rest will all be taught and given to you without any exertion on your part: This Gospel of the Ten Lepers is further expounded in a special book or postil, which examine for additional information. There you will also find the allegorical interpretation. or the spiritual meaning of it.

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