

I had a friend who was heavily involved in Church, very faithful disciple of Christ. He had two girls that he would bring with him to church and he had a wife, who wasn't a believer. I guess she had faith in the beginning when they got married but later on she decided that church wasn't for her. Then the wife got sick and we prayed for her and her healing, and as she was realizing how fragile her life is, she started to seek God again. Things were getting better in their marriage, and this scare of an illness brought them all together, strengthened their relationships with each other but especially with Christ, as they all prayed to him for healing.

And then she got well and we were all rejoicing, and praising God for this miracle. We all thought this is going to be a beginning of a new era. I mean she was back on track, she was healed, and she reconnected with her husband and with the Lord. I talked to my friend the next day after they got the good news and he was very sad. I said, what is going on? And he said, things had changed again, my wife is her old self again, she's healed and so she feels she doesn't need God anymore, she doesn't need me anymore, she acts like nothing ever happened.

In today's parable we read about ten lepers. People struck with incurable disease that made them unclean outcasts, not able to participate in the normal everyday life. They had to keep distance from everyone else for they could make others sick and so they were forced to live a lonely life of suffering and pain. (pause) Often times we're not much different from these lepers. We as well carry heavy burdens, for some they might be physical illnesses, for some addictions, for some troubled minds and spirits, for some constant worry about the future, or the past. There are so many things in our lives that separate us from each other, that make us outcasts within our communities, families and homes, (pause) that make us feel lonely, without friends and God.

It is in times like this that we pause and realize that something in our lives is missing, we realize that we desperately need healing and a new beginning, and so we start to search for someone or something that can help us, who can fill our lives with joy and peace, who can give them true meaning. You know I wanted to say that in moments like this we genuinely cry out to Jesus, "Have mercy on us!" Like the lepers in today's parable, but do we really? For the truth is that often times we seek help anywhere else but in Jesus. Do you know what I mean? And the

reason for that might be that we don't really believe that Jesus might have the solution, that he might be the answer. (pause)

But today's parable tells us that Jesus is truly there for those who cry out to him. He listens to us and hears our cries. Every time. For that's why he came, to be there for the lonely, the sick, the broken hearted, the oppressed, the ones struggling with guilt and sin, the ones judged and condemned by this world. He came for you and me.

And it is our faith in Jesus that can truly make us well. Faith is a powerful thing, it encompasses love and forgiveness and hope and there is so much strength in it. It is God's gift to us and it is the source our ultimate healing. My friends God chooses us for life with him, through the water of baptism he cleanses us from sin and gives us a new beginning, a promise of eternal life. The healing had already happened, but it can't happen for us, unless we allow it.

And so question is, "What is our response to this gift?" (pause) Are we willing to make this leap of faith and put genuine trust in God? There were ten lepers, but only one of them, when he saw that he was cured, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. Only one of them fell at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And when he did, Jesus looked at him and said the most amazing thing: "*Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.*" (pause) I always looked at this parable and thought that it was about gratitude. I always thought ten lepers were healed but only one thankful. But what I just realized was that only one of them was truly healed.

In Slovak Church when we do Holy Communion each time we individually lay hands on people that come forward and we pray this powerful prayer. We say: Dufajte synovial Bozi, dcery Bozie, odpustaju sa vam kajucim hriesnikom vsetky vase hriechy pre zasluhy, umucenie a smrt Baranka Jezisa Krista, v jeho ranach najdete milost a odpustenie hriechov. Vasa viera vas uzdravila, umyselne viac nehreste. And you're probably wondering what in the world did I just say. I prayed, "Have faith sons and daughters of God, as repenting sinners all of your sins are forgiven, for the deeds, suffering and the death of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. In his wounds you'll find grace and forgiveness of sins. Your faith has made you well, now go and sin no more. (pause)

Our Lord invites us on an exciting journey with him, it is a journey of grace and forgiveness, love and mercy, but most importantly it is a journey of faith, faith that can heal us, faith that can save us, faith that can change our lives and the lives of people around us. My friend's wife was healed physically, but she refused to receive the healing that really matters, the healing of her soul.

My prayer is that we receive God's grace abundantly with sincere faith. My prayer is that we as individuals will continue to walk in faith witnessing freely about what he has done in our lives, and I pray that as a community we'll continue to be Christ's hands and feet, his mouth and ears, so that everyone who comes into our midst will experience his love, acceptance and healing.

Amen