19 Ιανουαρίου 2020

Sermon on gratitude (Metropolitan Anthony Bloom †)

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English



17 December 1989

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Ten lepers came to the Lord; ten men who were ritually unclean and therefore, ritually rejected by their community, unable to attend the common worship of the Temple, unable to come near the habitations of men; and unclean also in the eyes of men because their sickness could be transmitted to others: others could become impure, others could be sick unto death.

They came to Christ and stood afar off because they knew that they had no right to come near, to touch Him as had done the woman who had an issue of blood and who had been healed. From afar off they cried for mercy, and the Lord healed them; He sent them to the priests in order to be ritually cleansed. Ten of them went, and nine never came back. One of them, discovering on his way that he was healed, let go of every other concern but his gratitude to Him that had restored him to wholeness. He came back and thanked the Lord, and the Gospel tells us that this

man was a Samaritan, a man who was outside of the Hebrew community, a man who had no rights within the people of Israel, a man who was not only a stranger, but a reject.

Why is it – and Christ Himself asks the question – why is it that nine of them never thought of returning? Because they felt that now that they were clean they were restored to the wholeness of the people of Israel; they needed nothing more, they had everything. The Samaritan knew that he had been cleansed, healed, made whole without having any right to this love of God and this act of Christ.



Isn’t it true that gratitude springs up in our hearts more powerfully, more gloriously when what we receive is undeserved, when it is a miracle of divine and human love? When we think that we deserve something and receive it, we receive it as our due; so did the nine Jews. But the Samaritan knew he had no right to the mercy of God, no right to this miracle of healing, and his heart was filled with gratitude.

Does this not apply to us? Indeed, it does! Indeed it does so sadly, because all of us do feel that we have a right: a right to human concern, to human love, a right to everything which the earth and human relationships can give, ultimately, a right for God's care and love for us. And therefore, when we receive a gift we are superficially grateful, we say a perfunctory 'thank you'; but it does not transform our relationship, either to God or to those who have been merciful to us. We receive it as our due, and we are grateful to those who were instrumental in conveying to us what 'naturally' we had a right to have.

The first Beatitude speaks to us in that respect very clearly: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God……Who are the poor in spirit? It is not those who are simply poor; poverty does not call out the great virtues simply by itself; the poor in spirit are those who in their heart and mind, in their whole self, know that they possess nothing which is not a gift, and deserve nothing of what gratuitously is given to us. Let us reflect one moment on this.

We did not come into being of our own volition; God brought us into being, and not by command, by an act of power. He brought us into being by an act of love, He loved us into existence. By doing this, He says to us: I love you! Without you, the world which I have created would be incomplete in my eyes; but also, I have faith in you that you will not betray my trust. I put my hope in all the good there is in you; My love will never falter, My faith and hope in you will remain unshaken – respond to them! The wonder is that however little we believe in God, God believes in us. Is not this a marvel, a wonder? And we exist only because of this faith of God in us, because of this hope and love He has vested in us.

And if we think further we have not only existence – we are alive, alive with the breath of God that makes us akin to Him, capable of knowing Him! And again, He has revealed Himself to us in so many ways, but ultimately in the Incarnation: God Himself has become man for us to see how much we are loved, and how great we are in His eyes, and indeed how great we are potentially in our humanity; we can all become by communion to Christ the sons and daughters of the Living God, partakers of the Divine nature. And to achieve this Christ has given us His life, His teaching, His death, the forgiveness He gave to those who crucified Him: Forgive them, Father, they don't know what they are doing! This applies to us also, all the time, day in, day out, of His Resurrection, and the manifestation of our human glory by His sitting at the right hand of God, Saint John Chrysostom says, If you want to know how great man is, look up to the throne of God – you will see Man enthroned at the right hand of glory!

Is not that enough for us to be grateful, to be grateful before any other particular gift is bestowed: the love of our closest, and of other people that care, the security of life, food, air, health! But we all take this for granted; we are not poor in spirit – we take it as our due; why should we be grateful that we are given what is our right? Why shouldn't God give us all that is His obligation to give. This is our attitude, we don't formulate it so crudely, but we live by it!

The Samaritan did not; he had no right to share anything that was the right of Israel – and he was given it! And his gratitude was aflame, aglow! Can we not learn something from him? And also, can we not realise how wonderful it would be if out of gratitude we lived in such a way as to give God joy, the joy of knowing that He has not created us in vain, that He does not believe in us in vain, that He has not put His trust in us in vain, that His love has been received, is now incarnate, not only in emotion, but in action! Saint Paul says, It is a greater joy to give than to receive; is that our attitude? If we are truly grateful for the gifts which are ours – how generously, how joyfully we would give to everyone around us in an act of love which would be our sharing in the love of God… And if we realised that all we have, in body, in soul, in circumstances of life, even in the tragedies of life, comes because God has sent us into the world as His messengers to bring divine presence at a cost, if necessary, of our lives – how grateful we would be, and how we would live in order that God should look at us, each of us, and say, Here is a disciple of Mine who has understood, and who lives accordingly!

Let us reflect on this; let us learn to live out of gratitude, out of the joy of being loved, out of our communion with God, but knowing that it is an act of gratuitous

generosity, that we have no rights – and yet we possess all things. Saint Paul said that: I have nothing, and I possess all things. Each of us could be such a rich person in our utter poverty, rich with all the love and power and richness of God.

Let us reflect, and let us give God, in an act of gratitude not only spoken, not only dimly felt, but lived in every action of our life: let us give Him joy, and the certainty that He has not created us in vain, not lived and died for us in vain, that we are truly disciples who have understood and who want to live His Gospel. Amen.

Source: agiazoni.gr