



The Holy See

HOLY MASS AND CANONIZATION:

GIOVANNI BATTISTA SCALABRINI AND ARTEMIDE ZATTI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St Peter's Square

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[Multimedia]

As Jesus was walking along, ten lepers met him and cried out: “Have mercy on us!” (*Lk 17:13*). All ten were healed, yet only one of them returned to thank Jesus. He was a Samaritan, a kind of heretic for the Jewish people. At the beginning, they were walking together, but then the Samaritan left the others and turned back, “praising God with a loud voice” (v. 15). Let us stop and reflect on these two aspects of today’s Gospel: *walking together* and *giving thanks*.

First, *walking together*. At the beginning of the account, there is no difference between the Samaritan and the other nine. We only hear that they are lepers, who together, as a group, approach Jesus. Leprosy, as we know, was not only a physical affliction, one which even today we must make every effort to eliminate, but also a “social disease”, since in those days, for fear of contagion, lepers had to remain apart from the community (cf. *Lev 13:46*). Hence, they could not enter villages; they were kept at a distance, isolated and relegated to the margins of social and even religious life. By walking together, these lepers indicted a society that excluded them. We should also note that the Samaritan, although considered a heretic, “a foreigner”, is part of their group. Brothers and sisters, whenever disease and fragility are shared, barriers fall and exclusion is overcome.

This image is also meaningful for us: when we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we are all sick at heart, all sinners in need of the Father’s mercy. Then we stop creating divisions on the

basis of merit, social position or some other superficial criterion; our interior barriers and prejudices likewise fall. In the end, we realize once more that we are brothers and sisters. Even Naaman the Syrian, as the first reading reminded us, for all his wealth and power, could only be healed by doing something simple: wash in the river in which everyone else was bathing. First of all, he had to remove his armour and his robes (cf. *2 Kings* 5). We would do well to set aside our own outer armour, our defensive barriers, and take a good bath of humility, mindful that all of us are vulnerable within and in need of healing. All of us are brothers and sisters. Let us remember this: the Christian faith always asks us to walk alongside others, never to be solitary wayfarers. Faith always urges us to move beyond ourselves and towards God and our brothers and sisters, never to remain enclosed within ourselves. Faith invites us to acknowledge constantly that we are in need of healing and forgiveness, and to share in the frailty of those who are near to us, without feeling ourselves superior.

Brothers and sisters, let us reflect and see if in our lives, in our families, in the places where we daily work and spend our time, we are capable of walking together with others, listening to them, resisting the temptation to lock ourselves up in self-absorption and to think only of our own needs. To walk together – to be “synodal” – is also the vocation of the Church. Let us ask ourselves if we are really communities truly open and inclusive of all; if we cooperate, as priests and laity, in the service of the Gospel; and if we show ourselves welcoming, not only in words but with concrete gestures, to those both near and far, and all those buffeted by the ups and downs of life. Do we make them feel a part of the community? Or do we exclude them? I am troubled when I see Christian communities that divide the world into the good and the bad, saints and sinners: this makes them feel superior to others and exclude so many people that God wants to embrace. Please, always be inclusive: in the Church and in society, which is still marred by many forms of inequality and marginalization. Always be inclusive. Today, the day in which Bishop Scalabrini becomes a saint, I think of emigrants. The exclusion of emigrants is scandalous. Actually, the exclusion of emigrants is criminal. They are dying right in front of us, as the Mediterranean is the largest cemetery in the world. The exclusion of emigrants is revolting, sinful and criminal. Not opening doors to those in need – “No, we do not exclude them, we send them away” to camps, where they are exploited and sold like slaves. Brothers and sisters, today let us call to mind these emigrants, especially those who are dying. And those who are able to enter, do we welcome them as brothers and sisters or do we exploit them? I simply pose the question.

The second thing is *giving thanks*. In the group of the ten lepers, there was only one who, realizing that he was cured, turned back to praise God and to show gratitude to Jesus. The other nine were healed, but then went their own way, forgetting the one who had healed them. They forgot the graces given to them by God. The Samaritan, on the other hand, makes the gift he received the first step of a new journey: he returns to the one who healed him; he goes back to Jesus in order to know him better; he enters into a relationship with the Lord. His grateful attitude, then, is no mere act of courtesy, but the start of a journey of thanksgiving: he falls at Jesus’ feet (cf. *Lk* 17:16) and worships him. He recognizes that Jesus is the Lord, that Jesus is more important than the

healing he received.

This is a great lesson also for us, brothers and sisters, who daily benefit from the gifts of God, yet so often go our own way, failing to cultivate a living and real relationship with him. This is a nasty spiritual disease: we take everything for granted, including faith, including our relationship with God, to the point where we become Christians no longer able to be amazed or to give thanks, lacking in gratitude and incapable of seeing the wonders of the Lord. A woman I know used to say, “They are rose-water Christians”. We end up thinking that all the gifts we receive each day are natural and due to us. Gratitude, the ability to give thanks, makes us appreciate instead the presence in our lives of the God who is love. And to recognize the importance of others, overcoming the dissatisfaction and indifference that disfigure our hearts. It is essential to know how to say “thank you”. To thank the Lord each day and to thank one another. In our families, for the little gifts we receive daily and so often do not even think about. In the places we spend our days, for the many services which we enjoy and for all those people who support us. In our Christian communities, for the love of God that we experience in the closeness of our brothers and sisters who, often silently, pray, sacrifice, suffer and journey with us. So please, let us not forget to say these key words: thank you!

The two saints canonized today remind us of the importance of walking together and being able to give thanks. Bishop Scalabrini, who founded two Congregations – one male and one female – for the care of emigrants, used to say that in the shared journeying of emigrants we should see not only problems, but also a providential plan. In his words: “Precisely because of the migrations imposed by persecutions, the Church pressed beyond the confines of Jerusalem and of Israel, and became ‘catholic’; thanks to the migrations of our own days, the Church will be an instrument of peace and of communion among peoples” (*L’emigrazione degli operai italiani*, Ferrara, 1899). The emigration currently taking place in Europe is causing great suffering and forcing us to open our hearts – that is the emigration of Ukrainians who are fleeing from war. Let us not forget war-torn Ukraine. With great vision, Scalabrini looked forward to a world and a Church without barriers, where no one was a foreigner. For his part, the Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti – with his bicycle – was a living example of gratitude. Cured of tuberculosis, he devoted his entire life to serving others, caring for the infirm with tender love. He was said to have carried on his shoulders the dead body of one of his patients. Filled with gratitude for all that he had received, he wanted to say his own “thank you” by taking upon himself the wounds of others.

Let us pray that these Saints, our brothers, may help us to walk together, without walls of division; and to cultivate that nobility of soul, so pleasing to God, which is gratitude.