

Jesus Teaches in the Synagogue of Capharnaum, and Heals Two Lepers

Jesus again passed by the estate of the Centurion Zorobabel as He and His disciples were hurrying along, for the Sabbath had already begun. In his charity, Zorobabel had permitted two young Scribes of about twenty-five years, who on account of their dissolute life had been stricken with

leprosy, to take up their abode in his garden. They were perfectly loathsome to look upon, and in their misery subjected to the greatest contempt. The red mantles that enveloped them hid the ulcers with which they were covered.

They had once formed a part of Magdalen's gay coterie at Magdalum, had afterward carried on their excesses in other places, and fell at last into the extreme misery in which they now were. At Jesus' recent visit to these parts, they were ashamed to present themselves before Him, but now, convinced by the news of His miracles and great mercy, they had allowed themselves to be dragged to a place near the road by which He would pass and where they could cry to Him for help. Jesus would not pause. He hurried on, but told two of Zorobabel's servants, who came running after Him pleading for the unfortunate creatures, to bring them to the synagogue in Capharnaum.

When the people were assembled, they (the servants) were to conduct the lepers to the gallery one story high that had been built adjoining the synagogue, and from which the teaching going on inside could be heard by those from without. There they should pray and excite themselves to contrition until He should call them. The servants immediately hastened back, and took the poor men by a shortcut through the flowery ravine to Capharnaum. They dragged them, though not without difficulty, up the outside steps to the gallery where, leaning in at the windows of the synagogue, they could, apart from the throng and in the open air, listen to the teachings of Jesus and with penitent hearts await their Saviour's call.

Jesus soon arrived with the disciples. After they had washed their feet and ungirded their garments, they entered the synagogue. When Jesus approached the pulpit, He found it occupied by one who was reading aloud. The latter, however, at once arose and yielded his place to Jesus, who



immediately took the roll of Scriptures and began to teach upon the passages referring to Jacob's being called to account by Laban, his struggle with the angel, his reconciliation with Esau, and the seduction of Dina, after which He turned to the Prophet Osee. When Jesus without the least hesitation took the rolls and began to read, the Pharisees smiled scornfully, as if to pronounce Him wanting in courtesy. They were exasperated at Jesus' reappearance, for the raising of the youth of Naim, as well as His numerous cures in Mageddo, were already noised throughout Capharnaum. They watched eagerly and with inquietude to see what new thing He was now going to undertake. Almost all of Jesus' relatives, including the women, were gathered today in the synagogue.

As the crowd was leaving the synagogue followed by Jesus, the disciples, and the Pharisees, these last thought they would still carry on the dispute with Jesus in the portico, but an unforeseen incident prevented their design. Jesus went to the door, looked up to the gallery where the two unclean men were still standing, and called to them to come down. But they were timid and ashamed. Through fear of the Pharisees, they did not venture to obey at once. Then Jesus commanded them, in a name that I cannot recall, to come down, and to their own great astonishment they found themselves able to descend the steps alone. The portico had been lighted up with torches for the convenience of the dispersing crowd. How furious were the Pharisees when they recognized by the dull glare of the torches the two poor, despised sinners in their red mantles! The lepers sank trembling on their knees before Jesus. He laid His hand on them, breathed into their faces, and said: "Your sins are forgiven you!" and admonished them to continence and the baptism of penance. He commanded them also to forsake their vain studies, for that He Himself would teach them the truth and the way. They rose up.

Their disfigurement had visibly decreased, their ulcers had dried, and the scales had fallen off. With tears they thanked their Benefactor, and left the place with Zorobabel's servants. Many of the well-disposed among the bystanders pressed around the cured, celebrating in words of praise their penance and their healing.

The Pharisees, however, were mad with rage. They cried out to Jesus: "What! Healest Thou on the Sabbath! And dost Thou also forgive sins! How canst Thou forgive sins?" Then, turning to the people, they cried: "He has a devil who helps Him! He is a madman! That is easily seen in His wandering about.

Scarcely had He begun to carry on His game here, when off He goes to Naim to raise the dead, then to Mageddo, and then back here again! No good man in his senses would carry on in that way! He has a powerful, wicked spirit who helps Him!" And they added: "When Herod finishes with John, this Man's turn will come, unless He takes Himself out of the way!" But Jesus went out through the midst of them. His female relatives, who had waited for Him in a neighboring house after leaving the synagogue, wept and lamented over the violent rage of the Pharisees.

Jesus left the city and, taking the road to the northeast, directed His steps to the hill beyond the valley where Mary's house stood. On the way thither were clumps of trees and grottos in which He stopped to pray. He arrived late at Mary's, where He consoled the women, after which He again went out and spent the whole night in prayer.

Next morning, Jesus repaired to the garden in the neighborhood of Peter's house. It was enclosed by a hedge, and in it all the preparations for Baptism had been made. There were several circular cisterns, formed in the ground and surrounded by a little channel, into which the water of a stream running nearby could be turned. A long arbor could, by hangings and screens, be divided into little compartments for the convenience of the neophytes when disrobing. An elevated stand had been erected for Jesus. The disciples were all present and about fifty aspirants to Baptism, among the latter some relatives of the Holy Family, an old man and three youths from Sephoris, the boy whom Jesus had healed at that same place, and the old woman from there, who had recently visited Jesus in Abesz. There were present, moreover,

Cyrinus from Cyprus; the Roman Centurion Achias and his little, miraculously cured son Jephtha, of Giskala; the Centurion Cornelius, his yellow slave who had been cured by Jesus, and several of his domestics; many pagans from Upper Galilee; a dark-skinned slave of Zorobabel; the five publicans of Mageddo; some boys, among whom was Joses, the nephew of Bartholomew; likewise all the cured lepers and possessed of these parts, including the two young Scribes healed the preceding evening. The last mentioned were indeed free from ulcers, but their countenance was still disfigured and bore the marks of suffering.

All the neophytes were clothed in penitential robes of gray wool, a four-cornered kerchief over their heads. Jesus instructed and prepared them for Baptism, after which they retired into the arbor and put on their baptismal

garments, white tunics, long and wide. Their heads were uncovered, the kerchief, now thrown round their shoulders, and they stood in the channel around the basins, their hands crossed on their breasts. Andrew and Saturnin baptized, while Thomas, Bartholomew, John and others imposed hands as sponsors. The neophytes, with bared shoulders, leaned over a railing around the edge of the basin. One of the disciples carried a vessel of water that had been blessed by Jesus, from which the baptizers scooped some with the hand and poured it thrice over the heads of those being baptized. Thomas was sponsor to Jephthe, the son of Achias. Although several received Baptism at the same time, yet the ceremony lasted until nearly two O' clock in the afternoon.