

Homily for the 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 13, 2019
By Nick Thompson

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, (Striking breast) through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

The word confessor is derived from the Latin *confiteri*, which means both to confess and to profess. In the Confiteor we simultaneously confess our faults and profess our faith to the Lord our God. We confess our unworthiness and profess our belief. We are at once a sinner against and a believer in Jesus Christ the Lord our God. Among the early church fathers, to be a *confiteri*, a confessor, was a title of honor, designating those individuals who had confessed Christ publicly in time of persecution and had been punished with imprisonment, torture, exile, or labor in the mines, but who remained faithful, professing belief in Christ until the end of their lives. The title thus distinguished them from the martyrs, who were those who had undergone death for their faith.

And so, we have St Edward the Confessor, whose feast day is today October 13, declared 50 years ago the patron saint of our parish community. Edward was proclaimed a Saint due to his piety and faithfulness to the Catholic Faith during and after his time of persecution and trial. Edward abandoned even by his mother lived in exile from England for 31 years 1013-1044. While in exile he made a promise of chastity and remained celibate even after his marriage to Edith, the daughter of one of his closest advisors. Edward the Confessor was a deeply religious man. Some called him the monk-king since he prayed frequently and attended Mass every day. On becoming king of England, unlike other kings of his time rather than seeking glory he sought to be a servant of the people. Seeing the devastation of continual war on his country and its people he put an end to war during his reign. He began building projects one of which was Westminster Abbey to provide jobs and teachers for the poor. The church is dedicated to the coronation of kings and royal weddings. He became noted for his life of prayer and his advocacy for the poor and the unemployed. For these actions he was beloved by the people. Thus, years after his death, upon being declared a saint he gained the title confessor. He is seen as the patron saint of difficult marriages.

Our readings this morning focus appropriately enough on a series of '*confiteri*,' confessions and professions. Leprosy in biblical times was

a highly infectious, incurable disease bringing about disfigurement of the body and painful slow death. It was seen as a punishment for some unconfessed sin against God committed either by the person themselves or some relative of theirs in the past. The fear of infection was so pronounced that any symptom of the disease meant exile from the community. 2nd Kings relates to us the story of Naaman and his movement from arrogance to humility, from denial of faith to confession and his eventual profession of faith. Naaman is a powerful general of the armies of Aram who becomes aware that he has contracted leprosy and apparently hides it. In time his king discovers Naaman's secret and though the disease is highly infectious the king needs Naaman's leadership skills in battle. The king has heard rumors that Israel a neighboring kingdom has people able to heal such diseases and so he sends Naaman to Jerusalem with tribute to buy a cure. The king of Israel, fearful of his powerful enemy, sends Naaman to the prophet Elisha and Naaman confesses to Elisha that he is a leper. Elisha knows that only God can heal this disease and so after much prayer tells Naaman he must bathe in the Jordan 7 times. At first Naaman refuses but his Jewish servants plead with him to do as the prophet says. Naaman relents and returns to the Jordan, which is where our first reading picks up this morning.

Naaman sees and feels his skin after coming out of the water and is overcome with joy. Just as we immerse ourselves in the graces of the seven sacraments and through grace profess our faith, Naaman because he is cured, professes his belief in the God of Israel. Elisha refuses to take tribute for what God has done. Elisha is not God. Naaman then requests dirt so that he has with him a means to publicly profess to his people and his king that his allegiance, his profession of faith, his sacrifice to God is now to the One God of Israel. Just as we sang together in psalm 98; He will from now on sing a new song with his life, He will no longer wage war against God's people. Naaman becomes a "confiteri" to his king and his people and for this we can be sure he will be persecuted.

Our Gospel today has Jesus walking along the border between Samaria and Galilee, two regions of God's own people, now enemies, divided by temples, exiles and stubborn refusal to compromise. Sounds a bit like Catholics and Protestants. Interestingly the ten lepers were probably a mixture of Samaritans, Jews and Gentiles united by their incurable disease since all were exiled from society due to their infectious nature and so they believed, obvious punishment from God. Birds of a feather flocking together due to common disease. With raised voices they cry out and in accordance with the law confess their diseased state to Jesus. Jesus says, "Go show yourselves to the priests." Being cured along the way the question arises, Did Jesus mean the priests in

the Samaritan temple at Mount Gerizim or the priests in the Jewish temple mount in Jerusalem? The now cleansed lepers have a dilemma, "If I pick the wrong priest will the disease return? To which temple priest do I profess my faith?"

Of the ten one recognizes and professes his belief in a new high priest, a new temple of the Holy Spirit and giving glory to Jesus Christ returns and falls at Jesus' feet perhaps singing with us Psalm 98: The Lord has made his salvation known; He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God. The foreign leper now cleansed becomes a "confiteri" his faith in Jesus has saved him.

Paul's letter to Timothy echoes the same refrain. Paul a Jew and a Roman publicly confesses his belief, his profession of faith in Jesus Christ risen from the dead. The same man who publicly persecuted Christ's body the church, confesses that persecution and professes his faith in Christ Jesus. Paul's action as "*confiteri*" for him will end in martyrdom. He will bear everything for our sake providing us with trustworthy words to live our lives by, "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we persevere, we shall also reign with him." For the last fifty years this community has provided a place for us to come and publicly confess our unworthiness, "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy Lord have mercy," a place for us to clean the leprosy of sin from our souls, "Forgive me Father

for I have sinned.” For the last fifty years this community has provided a place for us to come and publicly profess our faith. “I believe in God the Father almighty,” to express our belief in Jesus, “The body of Christ.” Amen! “The blood of Christ.” Amen! Today as we publicly join in celebration let us joyfully pray that we continue to confess our weakness with repentance and profess our faith with our lives so that we like our patron saint come to be known as “confiteri,” “confessor’s of the faith,” on our journey to sainthood.