

## Chapter 23 – We Have Seen Wonderful Things Today

One day the multitudes pressed so eagerly upon Him as He was walking by the Sea of Galilee, that our Lord got into a boat, which was Simon Peter's, and told him to push off a little from the land. Then, sitting down in the boat, He taught the people who came crowding down right to the water's edge. When He had finished speaking He said to Simon: "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." Now, Simon and his partners had been out all night casting their nets first on one side then on the other, and all to no purpose. "What was the use," a fisherman might have said, "of trying any more at present. But Simon had seen enough by this time to make him obey without a word.

"Master," he said, " we have laboured all night and have taken nothing, but at Thy word I will let down the net."

And when they had done this they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes and their net broke. And they beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the ships so that they were almost sinking. Lower and lower sank the boats till the water was almost level with the edge. It was scarcely safe to move. Peter was overpowered with the greatness of the miracle. How near God was! How unfit was he to be in His Presence! Trembling, he cast himself at the feet of Christ, crying out:

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!" For he was wholly astonished and all that were with him at the draught of fishes which they had taken. And so were also James and John, who were Simon's partners. And Jesus said to Simon:

"Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." And, having brought their ships to land, leaving all things they followed Him. Simon must have followed, wondering what those words could mean: "Henceforth thou shalt catch men."

As our Lord was walking one day through a certain city, whose name we are not told, a miserable object that had managed to escape notice darted from out a hiding place and flung itself on His path. It was a man, but in so frightful and loathsome a state as to appear scarcely human. Coarse white hair half covering what remained of a face, eyes glassy and staring, eyelids and lips gone, cheeks eaten away by disease, neck and hands covered with white scales—he is described by St. Luke the physician in three words: "a man full of leprosy."

He had no business in the city, for lepers were forbidden to approach their fellow-men. They carried about with them the corruption of the grave, their presence polluted the air; they were counted as already dead, whose place was among the tombs, not in the homes of the living. Their nearest and dearest fled from them, they were driven out into the wilderness with the beasts. Without shelter, or food, or medicine, or covering for their misery, they wandered about, objects of fear and horror to all. If any came near them, they were bound to cry out their dismal warning—"Unclean! Unclean!" From a distance they begged of passers by a morsel of bread, an old rag to cover their sores. Men shouted after them, threw stones at them and reviled them, not because they were wicked but because they were so sorely afflicted, because they were lepers. This poor leper knew that by coming into the city he was breaking the Law. But he had heard that Jesus of Nazareth healed every disease and every infirmity, perhaps He would have pity on Him. There he lay, his

mouth in the dust of our Lord's feet, hiding his disfigured face. But as he fell down there a cry had gone up:

"Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." And Jesus having compassion on him stretched forth His hand and touched him and said:

"I will ; be thou made clean." A word would have been enough, but He touched him. He did not shrink from those loathsome sores. He beheld them with divine compassion, and—perhaps because the leper is the, image of the sinner—He touched them with infinite gentleness. And instantly the leper was cleansed. There was no time for the indignant crowd to revile him, to catch up stones and cast at him, for before the sound of his prayer had died away he was a leper no more.

"Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." "I will; be thou made clean." The words came back like the echo of his own. Oh, words and touch of Christ ! All he had lost they restored. He felt the life blood coursing freely through his veins. The pain, the unsightliness, the misery of mind and body—all with those hideous scales had fallen from him. He was a free man once more, free to stand up erect among his fellow-men, to go back to the old home and to all he loved.

Our Lord looked down kindly on the radiant face lifted to His and said:

"See thou tell no one, but go, show thyself to the priest." Willingly would he present himself to the priest to have his cure attested. But keep silence when his heart was bursting with joy and praise, how could he? Surely, he thought, this command did not bind him, and going away he began to blaze abroad what Jesus of Nazareth had done for him.

A vast crowd gathered one morning round a house in Capharnaum. Within the Master sat teaching. There was no room; no, not even at the door, for the cure of the leper had made a great sensation throughout the country, and "Pharisees and doctors of the Law from every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem," were there. It was not with any hope of gaining admittance that the patient crowd waited, but to catch a glimpse of the great Teacher, perhaps to hear the tones of His voice as He came out.

Presently four men appeared carrying on his mattress bed a man sick of the palsy. Round and round the throng they went, and at last succeeded in making their way through and reaching the door. But no persuasion could win them entrance, and they were told angrily to go away and not make a disturbance. They seemed to yield, but after a while were seen hauling their helpless burden up the narrow outside staircase that led to the roof. Then they began to lift up the tiles of the roof, not without much noise and grave displeasure of the audience within. At last a hole large enough to admit the bed was made, and the sick man was let down into the midst before Jesus And when Jesus had seen their faith, He said to the sick of the palsy:

"Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Our Lord saw the state of the soul as distinctly as that of the body, and because He knew the much greater value of the soul, He thought of its health first. The poor man held up his trembling hands and looked wistfully at the great Physician, thinking only of the healing of the body, or afraid, perhaps, that his sins would render him unworthy of cure. In reward of his faith our Lord gave him true sorrow for his sins, without which there can be no forgiveness, and then He forgave them.

Now notice carefully what happened, for this scene, like another at Capharnaum later, is one of the most important in our Lord's Life. Remember who sat there, quite an unusual

gathering, Pharisees and doctors of the Law from every town of Galilee and Judea. These men began to think in their hearts:

"Why doth this Man speak thus?" He blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but God only? And Jesus seeing their thoughts said to them: "Why think you evil in your hearts? "Which is easier to say: Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say: Arise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the sick of the palsy:

"I say to thee, arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house." And immediately, rising before them, he took up his bed on which he lay and went his way in the sight of all, glorifying God. And all were astonished and glorified God saying:

"We have seen wonderful things today."

Notice in how many ways our Lord here shows Himself to be God. He sees the faith of the poor paralytic and his friends; He sees the evil thoughts of the Pharisees; He sees the sin on the soul; He forgives it, and works a miracle on the body to prove His power over the soul. St. Matthew says "they glorified God who gave such power to men." That is, they glorified God, not only for the cure of this poor man, but because the miracle had proved in the sight of such a multitude that it was possible to give to men the power of forgiving sin.

If people laugh at us for going to confession, and say they tell their sins to God and not to man—"who can forgive sins but God alone?" "Let us think of this scene at Capharnaum and of another in Jerusalem on Easter Day, when our Blessed Lord, appearing to the Apostles, passed on to them His own power, saying:

"Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven." And let us with the simple grateful people of Capharnaum glorify God who has given such power to men.

Followed as usual by the crowd, our Blessed Lord took the road from Capharnaum to the Sea of Galilee. Vessels were coming up to the little quay and discharging their cargoes, which were then carried up to the toll-booth of Matthew the publican, whose duty it was to tax them. He was sitting in the midst of bales of goods and piles of money, when, suddenly, amidst the noise and confusion of men coming and going, a Voice from without was heard:

"Follow Me." Matthew turned round, met the glance of Jesus of Nazareth, who was passing by, rose up immediately, and went out. He had probably seen our Lord before this and heard Him preach. But to be noticed by Him to be called to be His disciple—this was an honour he had never dreamed of. Not another thought for the business he was leaving, for the money just taken, for what people would say. The great Prophet and Wonderworker had called him—him a publican! His heart leaped with joyful surprise: It seemed too good to be true.

Publicans were looked upon as traitors to their country and to their God, because they collected the taxes for the Eomans, and as enormous sinners because of the injustice of which many among them were guilty. Every Jew, even the poorest, shunned and despised them. The righteous Pharisees drew away their garments lest those of a publican should touch and defile them. It must have astonished the disciples themselves to find a publican admitted into their little band. As for Matthew, he was obliged to find an outlet for his joy by giving a feast at which many publicans and sinners sat down with Jesus and His disciples. How delightful it is to think of our Blessed Lord making Himself at home in such company! But some Pharisees came in at the open door to look on, as was usual in the

East, and to find fault and disturb the happy gathering, which was not usual.

"Why doth your Master eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" they asked the disciples. Jesus hearing it said to them:

"They that are well need not the physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the just but sinners." Perhaps these just ones went away ashamed. Anyway we hear of no further objections at that time.