

Sermon – Up the Hanenkamm

St Luke Ch. 17. Vs 11-19.

Jesus often went up a mountain to pray and meditate. I have prayed on a mountain but under somewhat different circumstances. It was all part of a lovely holiday in Kitzbuehl in the Tyrol area of Austria. One day had involved a visit to Salzburg to Mozart's house where we saw a little violin that he'd played when he was three years of age. The following day was to involve a mountain climb. Very early in the morning people in the hotel prepared their sandwiches to climb the Hanenkamm. All the skier's had gone and the town was taken over by people and their sports cars, mostly Ferrari's, for a big event. But apart from that I'd noticed a Capuchin Chapel down one street and I longed to go there. Capuchin monks follow a strict rule of poverty, chastity and obedience and their founder was Francis of Assisi. Sure enough, my desire was fulfilled and I went to

the chapel for a service. The plan was that I would get the lift up the mountain to stage two and walk down with the others. I'd enjoyed a conversation with one of the monks and he gave me a chaplet of prayer beads.

To my dismay the lift failed to stop at Stage 2 and took me to the top of the mountain. I got out of the lift to see a magnificent display of alpine plants and spent time looking at them. I then looked around me to find that the lift had gone and the few people who had got out were gone too.

Just imagine there alone, and no mobile. Different paths going different ways led downwards. It was not just fear I experienced but a terrible aloneness and a sense of doom. No one to care or help me.

Think then of these Ten Lepers we hear of today in the gospel. They were all alone, even though in a crowd with others, with no one to rescue them. Luke tells us that they kept their distance from Jesus. They called out to him to

have mercy on them but they knew they were to keep away from him and from others, and others certainly kept away from them. What a life they led, forced to live apart from family and friends, congregating together, united by a common enemy - their dreaded disease. How often may each have thought: 'no-one is going to rescue me'. Perhaps all hope had gone. They may even have thought that their affliction was a judgement from God, if God was part of their thinking.

But Jesus is indiscriminate; he doesn't want to know what their religious or secular history is or how important or otherwise they might have been in the past, how good or how bad. No, he simply gives an instruction in keeping with the Law of Moses, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' If someone with leprosy believed themselves healed, they were to go to the priests, who made the final decision on their cure after examining them. Even before their healing

had taken place Jesus is telling them to go and show themselves to the priests. These poor souls were to go off as they were, leprosy and all, and it was as they went that they were healed. Their healing came as they obeyed Jesus with whatever faith they could muster and it could not have been easy. If they hadn't been healed, what kind of welcome might they have expected from the priests? I'm sure they would have been intensely fearful.

The prophet Isaiah has some wonderful words of encouragement, he writes: 'Say to those who are of a fearful heart, be strong, do not fear... here is your God, he will come and save you'. What is the weapon that will fight off such a thought as: 'no one will come to rescue me'? The weapon, of course, is faith. Faith delighted Jesus. He rewards faith time and time again. Remember the woman who touched the hem of his garment and was healed and the Syrophoenician woman who begged him to heal her

daughter; and blind Bartimaeus, who called out from the roadside: 'Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me!'. How many times does Jesus say: 'Go in peace, your faith has saved you?'

Now **I'm** still on the mountain praying with the beads that the monk gave me, was I exercising great faith at that time? I don't know, but believe it or not, as I was all alone, I heard my husband calling me. He'd spotted me from a distance, and recognised his brightly coloured jacket that I was wearing. Realising what had happened with the lift he started to walk back up the mountain again expecting to find me and thankfully, he knew the route back down.

I was rescued! Hallelujah!

Apart from delighting in faith there is something else that impresses Jesus and that is a heart of gratitude for blessings. Nine of the healed lepers didn't think for a moment of giving thanks but one does and pleases Jesus

with his action. Yes, someone did rescue the Lepers and Jesus has already rescued us by his sacrifice on the cross. It is a matter of believing and never losing hope. It's as easy or as difficult as that.

Amen.