

28th Sunday of the Year (2016)

(2 Kgs 5:14-17; 2 Tim 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19)

Our Scripture texts today seem to be about leprosy: the gospel is about Jesus curing ten lepers, and it looks as though the first reading about Naaman the Aramean, who was a leper, was chosen to go with it. But I think the real theme for today is gratitude. The gospel's emphasis is not so much on Jesus' cure of the ten lepers as about His disappointment at the lack of gratitude of nine. Jesus compares unfavorably the nine who did not return to give thanks with the one Samaritan who did. The nine who did not return could even be compared unfavorably with Naaman, the Aramean. He came to Elisha and asked to be cleansed. When Elisha told him to wash in the Jordan, Naaman at first thought that too simple a demand for so great a cure, and he was about to refuse, but his servants prevailed on him, with the result we know. I think this shows us that if God is to perform a miracle of healing it is **His** work, and nothing is required of us except faith. This miracle led to Naaman's conversion from paganism. From now on, he would worship none but the God of Israel, who had the power to do this; now that's gratitude.

Most of us, I fear, are more like the nine ungrateful lepers than Naaman. We may pray for years for the conversion of a friend or relative or for their return to

health. But do we give thanks equally as long if that prayer is granted? Rarely, I think.

Ancient Israel was no different. Of their one hundred and fifty psalms, I count fifty-nine which are psalms of petition or supplication. But of psalms of thanksgiving there are only thirteen.

You may ask if it is known how often a petition IS granted so as to expect thanksgiving. I think I'll say, as candidates sometimes say in presidential debates, "That question is not germane to the issue." And if you think that assertion is not truthful, that also happens sometimes in presidential debates.

Perhaps we need to ascend to another, higher, level. If we give thanks only for things we have asked for, doesn't that make us somewhat self-centered? There are many things that we need far more than those we ask for, that we already have. How often do we look around us, look within ourselves and reflect on how much we have to be grateful for? The list would be a long one: in nature alone: things that are beautiful: the grass, the trees, the clouds, the moon, the sky, the rain (not always convenient, but what would happen to us without it?). On a more personal level: our parents, who gave us birth, other family members, our sisters and brothers in religion, our friends, our teachers who have taught us, doctors who heal us, the people who provide services.

Israel had a whole category of psalms and canticles of praise to deal with this sort of thing. Psalm 103, begins:

"Bless the Lord, my soul!

all my being, bless his holy name!

Bless the Lord, my soul;

do not forget all the gifts of God, ..."

I think we can concede that to bless God for good things He has bestowed is to be grateful, to give thanks. We ought to rejoice to do this. The Israelite psalmist can say: "My lips will shout for joy as I sing your praise" (Ps 71:23).

We have a wonderful example in one such canticle from the Book of Daniel, the canticle of the three young men in the fiery furnace. We might think a fiery furnace would be the last place we would hear a hymn of praise, but there it is. The three start off, "All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord," (in Latin that was, "Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino") and they go on to enumerate these works in great detail: sun and moon, bless the Lord, stars of heaven, every shower and dew, fire and heat, cold and chill, ice and snow, nights and days, light and darkness, lightning and clouds, fountains and springs, seas and rivers, birds of the air, beasts wild and tame. And that's only part of the list of things we should be grateful for. We may not enjoy all of them

(cold and chill, ice and snow), but they are important to our existence. Without them there would be no winter and therefore no spring.

But I think we need to go higher still, up yet another level. On a more spiritual plane, we have the Eucharist, which we are celebrating now. We know that the word "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving," but perhaps we too seldom think of how great a gift this is and how grateful we ought to be for it. Beyond this are the other Sacraments--Baptism, Reconciliation, and so forth. The Mass and Eucharist are possible, of course, only because Jesus emptied Himself, suffered, died and was raised. And this was because the Father sent His Only Begotten Son, whom He loves (loves infinitely more than Abraham loved Isaac), to win redemption for us.

We should give thanks for the saints God has sent before us as examples, intercessors, protectors, for our Guardian Angels, and especially for our Blessed Mother Mary. We should give thanks for our Holy Father Pope Francis, who is striving to make the Church to be what it should be.

We need to do more than simply **speak words** of thanks. We think of Naaman, the Aramean leper, who changed his whole life out of gratitude. If our words are sincere, our lives need to correspond to what God wants them to be, most especially to be loving with a love that

is all inclusive, a love that will do for others all we can do and never harm others.

We all fail in many ways, a truly shameful return to God for such wondrous goodness. But even here we have a new cause for thanksgiving because God's love is everlasting, God's mercy is above all His works, so wonderfully summed up in that one verse, that beautiful verse: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16).

St. Teresa's favorite psalm verse, which she had inscribed in Latin under that famous painting of her, "Misericodias Domini in aeternum cantabo," "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever." If we are grateful for all we should be grateful for, if we give thanks and live lives that correspond to such thanks, then hopefully we will one day be able to say with her, "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever."