

## Be grateful, give thanks!

**28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year** – Cycle C – 13 October 2019

**Readings:** 2 Kings 5:14-17; 2 Tim 2:8-13; Lk 17:11-19

*“It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner” (Lk)*

### Three Scriptural Signposts

Two of today’s readings—the first and the third—describe so-called ‘pagan lepers’ being grateful to God for their healing and cleansing. Therefore, the theme we can dwell on today is thanksgiving and gratitude.

1. The first reading describes a healing miracle wrought by Elisha, the first of the great prophets of Israel after the separation of Israel from Judah. Prophet Elisha lived during the reign of King Achab (869-850) and was revered for the many miracles he worked. Today’s reading describes the healing of Namaan, a pagan army-commander of the King of Aram, who is struck with leprosy. Namaan is advised by a slave-girl from Israel to go to Prophet Elisha for healing. Elisha advises him to bathe in the River Jordan. Infuriated at the suggestion to bathe in a small river called ‘Jordan’ when there are bigger and better rivers back home, Namaan turns homeward. But his servants persuade him to believe in Elisha’s God. Miraculously, Namaan is healed and “returned to the man of God, he and all his company” (v.15). Deeply grateful for this cure, he begs Elisha to accept gifts. Elisha refuses. Finally, Namaan requests Elisha to allow him to carry back “two mule-loads of earth” to so-called ‘pagan territory’. Interestingly, in those times, pagans believed that gods thrived only on native soil. So Namaan thought that Yahweh, Israel’s God, would only survive on Israelite soil. Thus, he requested Elisha to permit him the two mule-loads of earth to build a sanctuary for Yahweh on Israel’s soil transported to pagan territory! Besides teaching us about gratitude and thanksgiving, this story reminds us that God’s salvific plans break all boundaries built by all ‘chosen people’.
2. The gospel passage contains the well-known story of the ‘ten lepers’. In Jesus’ day, medical knowledge was very primal and primitive. Thus, any skin disease would randomly be labeled as ‘leprosy’ and the one suffering such a disease would be immediately ostracized. In any case, leprosy was regarded as a most cursed and dreaded disease. Mosaic Law legislated that lepers be segregated on the margins of society, and, in case of cure, be certified to that effect by temple priests (see Leviticus chapters 13–14). That’s why Jesus says to the ten lepers: “Go and show yourselves to the priests” (v.14). In this episode, the Samaritan leper was doubly ‘untouchable’: being leper-*and*-pagan. But, when cured, it is only he who returns to thank Jesus and praise God.
3. Tying up the first and third readings with the theme of gratitude and thanksgiving, we note that it is not the ‘insider’ or the believer who is grateful and thankful but a so-called ‘pagan-outsider’ and ‘Samaritan’. At the start of the passage, *all* the ten lepers seem to beg of Jesus: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (v.13); but only one returns after being healed. Though God has no need of our praise and thanksgiving, yet, Jesus asks: “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to

return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" This story can also be called 'the grateful Samaritan leper' since only he had the decency to return, praise and thank God.

### **Linking the Second Reading to the Theme**

Apostle Paul exhorts his disciple and convert, Timothy, to be faithful in proclaiming the Good News entrusted to them. Last week's passage spoke of faith as a "treasure to be guarded" and this week Paul tells Timothy to "*Remember* Jesus Christ ...!" The core of the gospel is Christ's death-and-resurrection. This '*com-memoration*' or 'joint remembering' of the paschal mystery is what individual Christians and Christian communities should be grateful and thankful for. Even in chains and in prison, Paul sees Jesus as reason for joyful, grateful and thankful celebration.

### **Two Texts from Catholic Tradition**

Leo, the Great (400-461): "I entreat you, beloved, let those words of the Saviour touch your hearts, Who, when by the power of His mercy He had cleansed ten lepers, said that only one of them all had returned to give thanks Luke 17:18; meaning, without doubt that, though the ungrateful ones had gained soundness of body, yet their failure in this godly duty arose from ungodliness of heart. And therefore, dearly-beloved, that this brand of ingratitude may not be applied to you, return to the Lord, remembering the marvels which He has deigned to perform among us." [From his sermon n.84].

Pope Francis (On October 9, 2016, during the Extraordinary Year of Mercy): "To be able to offer thanks, to be able to praise the Lord for what he has done for us: this is important! So we can ask ourselves: Are we capable of saying 'Thank you'? How many times do we say 'Thank you' in our family, our community, and in the Church? How many times do we say 'Thank you' to those who help us, to those close to us, to those who accompany us through life? Often we take everything for granted! This also happens with God. It is easy to approach the Lord to ask for something, but to return and give thanks...?"

### **Reflection on the Word 'Eucharist' and 'Grace'**

The word 'Eucharist' comes from the Greek *Eucharistein* meaning 'to thank'. Isn't the Eucharist the supreme thanksgiving for all that God is and does? Moreover, the word 'thanks' in many languages—*dhanyavad*, *grazie*, *gracias* and *nandri*, for instance—all have to do with graces, goodness, blessings. Indeed, when I say '*Thanks*' to someone, I am actually saying: "You're a blessing to me!" That also explains our 'grace' before/after meals.

We know from catechism classes that the four traditional purposes of prayer are thanksgiving, adoration, petition and contrition. Sadly, like the nine ungrateful lepers, our prayers are often solely petitionary or penitentiary: "Jesus, Master take pity on us!" But, what about thanksgiving and adoration? How often do I say, "Thanks, Jesus!" and "Glory to God"?

**In Lighter Vein:** Little Amali was going to a friend's party. Her mummy advised her to be good and say "thanks!" to her friend's parents after the party. When Amali returned, mummy asked: "Did you say 'thanks' to Aunty?" Amali replied, "No! The girl before me said 'thanks' and Aunty said, 'don't mention!' and so I didn't!" God always says, "Don't mention!" to us even before we think of saying 'thanks'. But, wouldn't it be good if we continuously and consciously say, "Thanks, Lord!"? Let's be grateful for everything .... like the two 'pagan' lepers. [End]