

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

GRATITUDE IS AN URGENT DUTY

"Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked Him" (Luke 17: 15-16)

Gratitude is A Duty: St. Ambrose, one of the most influential ecclesiastical figures of the 4th century and notable influence in the life of St. Augustine of Hippo, wrote: "No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks." The import of this statement is that there is no excuse for ingratitude. It is a duty, it is urgent. This is the hallmark of our reflection this week. It is very important that we are reminded to be grateful, especially after a good deed done to/for us. Most often, we get over-excited and forget to say, "Thank you"; we forget to keep the promises we made to the Lord, and to the people who were there for us.

Obedience As the Hallmark for Healing: Between the First Reading (2 Kings 5: 14-17) and the Gospel (Luke 17: 11- 19) there are some striking similarities: first, the protagonists are lepers, who are aware of their conditions; in both instances, the lepers make profound request to be healed; they are healed by the prophet of God, Elisha and by Jesus; in both cases, the healing came as a result of obedience; and lastly, there is a return to express gratitude. Acknowledgement of one's condition is crucial for healing (of any sort). Do we acknowledge our various states? Do we seek help, when necessary? The lepers here sought for help – Naaman travelled from Syria to Samaria, more than 600 kilometres, and the lepers in the gospel cried out aloud: "Jesus, Master! Take pity on us." In the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus taught us: "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7: 7-11; Lk. 11: 9-10). We must not forget the crucial role of obedience in these miraculous healings – obedience is always a requirement for blessings from the Lord. Having been healed both returned to give thanks. These provide models or, if you like, templates for our receiving gifts from the Lord. Let us go into more details to sift out the residues for our spiritual nourishment.

"As He entered one of the villages, ten lepers came out to meet Him. They stood some way off and called to Him, 'Jesus, Master! Take pity on us'": Leprosy was a dreaded contagious disease at the time of Jesus. And from the Old Testament times, there were strict regulations about the relationship between the lepers and the healthy in the society. They were to wear torn

clothes, leave hair uncombed, cover the lower part of the face and call out “Unclean, unclean! He must live outside the camp and away from others. (cf. Leviticus 13: 14; Numbers 5: 2). No wonder they “stood some way off” from Jesus. He was separated from his family, isolated from the people, and treated as a taboo in the society. No sickness was more humiliating. This gives us a pint of the psychological trauma that lepers went through, added to the severity of the sickness. We do not need to question the desperation of these lepers when they saw Jesus. But how did they recognise Jesus? How did they know He could heal them? Someone must have told them about Jesus and what He could do. Who have we told about Jesus? Remember, “Faith comes through hearing” (Roman 10: 17). They did not simply believe in the power of Jesus, they were able to identify something uniquely Messianic in Him which made them address Him as “Master.” Anyone in the condition of the lepers would not ask for anything else, except to be healed. What do we desperately need? Who do we turn to?

“Go, show yourselves to the priests”: Jesus’ response should not really surprise us having known that the lepers were to stand off from the healthy but when we remember that in Matthew (8: 3), Jesus even reached down and touched the leper, we may wonder why he did not get closer to them to touch them. But here is something to consider: Jesus might have done this to prove that truly He came “not to abolish the law” (Matthew 5: 17). Therefore, He spoke to them from the distance and ordered them to go show themselves to the priests in obedience to the stipulations of the Law of Moses. Jesus’ action here demonstrates His humility and obedience. He recognised the role of the priests as stated by the Law and commanded them to go and show themselves to the priests, who were the only ones who could confirm their wholesome healing and reinstate them into the society (Leviticus 14: 1-9). The lepers obeyed, like Naaman did (though after some persuasion) in the First Reading, and like Naaman, they were healed as they walked on. In this miracle, we notice that it takes more than faith to receive miracles, sometimes, it demands obedience as well.

“Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked Him”: The miracles took place as they obeyed and started off to the temple. We notice two different responses to a particular incident here: whereas one, in his happiness and excitement returned to give thanks, the others went off happily without looking back. How do we respond to God’s blessings? Like Naaman and the one leper,

or like the nine others? The leper in the gospel “threw himself at the feet of Jesus”, that means he prostrated. This was an action no human being deserved. But he saw in Jesus, one who was more than human – He is his Master. This action reflects the depth of his gratitude. The Psalmist proclaims: “What shall I render to the Lord, for His goodness to me? A cup of thanksgiving I will raise; I will call on the Lord’s name. My vows to the Lord I will fulfil before all His people” (Psalm 116: 12-14). “A grateful heart is a humble heart; a humble heart is a religious heart; a religious heart is a reverential heart; a reverential heart is a liturgical heart; a liturgical heart is a praising heart which is in turn always joyful and healthy”.

“This made Jesus to say, ‘Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems no one has come back to give praise to God except this foreigner’”: The surprise of Jesus is obvious! One out of ten is a very poor score. You see, even God is surprised when we are ungrateful. We are created to be grateful because everything we have is a gift – “What do you have that you have not received?” asks St. Paul (1 Corinthians 4: 7). Another surprising element was the fact that the one who returned to give praise was a “foreigner.” He was a Samaritan – those the Jews regarded as “less human” and treated with scorn and disgust. To him grace flows like a running stream to do the needful to receive more than the rest. For when Jesus spoke the words: “Stand up and go your way. Your faith has saved you”, he got more than the physical healing. He got spiritual healing as well as forgiveness of sins. Gratitude is the attitude of a sensitive soul appreciative of its gifts. It is a sign of a good heart which, while it enjoys the gifts, is never forgetful of the giver of gifts. The nine lepers of our gospel were so engrossed with the blessings they had received and forgot their benefactor; this of course saddened him.

My dear friends, God has blessed us with every good gift. He has promised and has kept to His promise to be with us “at all times.” We pray that we never take any of His gifts for granted and that we may always be grateful.