

Commentary to the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Am I One of the Nine or the One Out of the Ten?



The Gospel reading presents the healing of the ten lepers. Let's begin by picturing these ten men walking up to Jerusalem. They had gone to Jesus, but left, still lepers, with nothing more than his assurance that they were to present themselves to the priests as healed. He didn't heal them immediately. What must that walk up to the Temple Hill in Jerusalem been like? Some of them must have been limping with deformed legs, most likely relying on crutches. Some had lost fingers and even parts of their face. Many had horrible sores all over their bodies. They were hideous. All of them had bells. All were required to call out continually, "Unclean, unclean.?"

The healthy would do everything possible to avoid them. That is why at the beginning of the Gospel the lepers stood off at a distance and called to Jesus to heal them. But back to their journey to the priests, the very unlikely parade, walking, dragging probably, approaching the Temple. Did they all have faith, or were some of them going to the Temple because they thought they had nothing to lose? Their lives were horrible. What worse could happen to them? Did all believe, or were some of them just joining in with the others? We don't know. So they plodded on. I wonder when it was that they realized that they could walk easier. When was it that they saw that they were no longer deformed? When was it that their skin had healed? It had to be before they got to the Temple, because by the time they reached the Temple priests they were healed.

So why didn't all ten return to the Lord to give thanks to God? Why was it that nine never bothered? Perhaps some of them were angry. Angry that they had gotten so sick in the first place. Maybe they were so angry that they couldn't see their healing as a gift. They could only see their sickness as a curse. Maybe they were upset that they had missed so much in life. They were people who saw the glass as half empty, not half full. Or, maybe some of them were completely self-absorbed. Perhaps

some were like little children who were never taught to say, "Thank you," as though they had a right to all good things in the world. It is rather shocking to think that some people could be so angry, or so self-centered that they do not appreciate the gifts of the Lord. Sadly, that is exactly what happens. People who can only see the negatives in life, cannot appreciate the gifts of God.

People who think they are the center of the world, cannot fathom why they should be grateful to anyone for what they think they have coming. We should ask ourselves: Am I a positive person or a negative person? Do I usually see the good in life, or am I absorbed by the negative? When I recover from the flu or any sickness, do I thank God that I am feeling better, or am I upset that I felt so poorly before?

When a former friend or an estranged relative wants to reconcile, am I willing to move on with the future, or do I stay mired in the past? When the pain of life has been removed, do I keep it alive in my mind by dwelling on the past? We have been sick, and we have been healed. We have been estranged, and we have been re-united. We have been lost, and we have been found. Christians are optimists. If we are negative in certain areas of life, then we need to bring this very negativity to God. We need to ask Him for faith. We have all had times of immaturity in our lives when we've convinced ourselves that we are the center of the universe. Now, it is perfectly acceptable for a baby to be self-absorbed. The baby's cries are the only way that we can be made aware of his or her needs. It is not acceptable for the rest of us to be self-absorbed. Does God owe us healing?

Did God allow His Son to become one of us and then die for us because we had a right to salvation? Of course not. We are benefactors of a kind and compassionate God who really does love us, who really is "Our Father." We need to recognize His Gifts and thank Him. One of those former lepers, a Samaritan, returned to the Lord. He was out of the mainstream, not even Jewish. He wasn't part of the chosen people. But he knew that God had chosen him. He knew that he received a grace from God. He knew that he didn't do anything to deserve this gift, but was the recipient of God's compassion.

He wanted others to rejoice with Him. He wanted Jesus to know how grateful he was. He returned to thank the Lord. Many times a child, particularly an older child, a Teen or a young adult, receives a great gift from his or her Mom or Dad, and then says, "What can I do to pay you back?? Inevitably, the parent responds, "I didn't do this for you because I want repayment. I did this because I love you. All I want is that you be good to your brothers and sisters,? or perhaps, "All I want is that you be good to others like we were good to you.? That is all God wants from us. He wants us to show our gratitude by being good to our brothers and sisters, by being good to others as He has been good to us. You see, thanking God is not a matter of words or recited prayers.

To thank God we have to treat others as He treated us, with compassion, mercy and love. Were not all ten made clean? Where are the other nine? Where do we go when we realize that we have experienced Divine Love? Do we stay where we are? Do we walk backwards to where we were out of anger for our past? Or do we spread the Grace that we have received to others by our care and compassion? Are we one of the nine? Or are we the one out of the ten, the one who returned glorifying God with His life?

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