



## Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time October 9, 2016 C

### The Importance of the Prayer of Thanksgiving

Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God? (Luke 17:17-18)

In one of the prefaces at Mass, we have these words:

*Father, all powerful and ever-living God,  
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.  
You have no need of our praise,  
yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift.  
Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your  
greatness, but makes us grow in your grace,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

In today's Gospel, we heard the familiar story of the ten lepers and how only one of them returned to Jesus to offer thanks. All ten were cured of leprosy but only one was saved. That leper returned, recognized Jesus, threw himself at Jesus' feet and offered him praise. Jesus said to him, "Stand up, go your way, your faith has been your salvation." All ten were cured on a physical level, but it seems only one was converted to Jesus and, therefore, healed on a spiritual level. People receive great blessings from God, e.g., a miraculous cure, an escape without injury in a car wreck or hurricane, and yet their life with God remains untouched. Ideally, awareness of God's blessings in our lives should move us to give ourselves to him a little more fully.

In my book, *13 Powerful ways to Pray*, I have a chapter on *The Prayer of Thanksgiving* and why it is so important in our lives. I write:

In the prayer of thanksgiving, we give gratitude to God for his loving activity in creation, in the lives of others, and in our own lives. The prayer at the beginning of this column indicates that God has no need of our thanks in the way that we may need stroking and affirmation. Yet we can safely assume that our prayers and deeds of thanks do please God. Even more, we know that developing a grateful heart toward God is beneficial to our mental and spiritual well-being. When we take time out to recognize and give thanks to God for what is good in life, we not only recognize God as the Source of all good things, but we also grow in our experience of God as a loving and

generous Person. In turn, this experience of God will probably lead us to a more generous giving of ourselves to God and sharing our resources with others. In short, our acts of gratitude to God and others deepen our relationship with God; hence, the vital importance of taking time out for the prayer of thanksgiving.

We show extreme ingratitude when we take little or no time to identify God's gifts or blessings and rarely give thanks. Worse still, we may believe that the blessings in life are just the result of our own hard work and ingenuity. Moses sternly warned the Israelites not to have that attitude toward the blessings of God. He says to them: "You then become haughty of heart and unmindful of the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery; who guided you through the vast and terrible desert; .... who fed you in the desert with manna.... Otherwise, you might say to yourselves, 'It is my own power and the strength of my own hand that has obtained for me this wealth.' Remember then, it is the LORD, your God, who gives you the power to acquire wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:14-18).

Moses is reminding the Israelites never to forget the gratitude they owe to the one who is the Source of their blessings. When we take little or no time out to give thanks to God, we may begin to think that God is more or less absent from our lives. When we lose the connection between God and the good things in life we run the risk of losing our relationship with God, period. We will perceive God as distant and uninvolved in our lives.

Our prayer of thanksgiving not only enhances our relationship with God, but it also helps our own general sense of well-being. The grateful person is usually a happy person, and the grumbling person is usually unhappy. The priest/sociologist, Andrew Greeley, in his book, *The Bottom-Line Catechism*, writes:

*The empirical research my colleagues and I have done confirms the age-old Christian tradition that prayers of gratitude are the most important, for the relationship between prayer and mental health and marital satisfaction seems to be true only for those whose frequent prayers are prayers of thanksgiving. Prayer brings psychological peace and personal happiness precisely insofar as it becomes a grateful response to a gift of love that is perceived as having already been given.*

In his book, *Pastoral Life in the Power of the Spirit*, the late world famous catechist, Jesuit Father Johannes Hofinger writes:

*Lack of gratitude is always a clear sign of selfishness, and selfishness is the hotbed of all kinds of emotional disturbances. Genuine, deep gratitude, on the other hand, opens man in a healthy way toward others; it always helps him to overcome an unhealthy concentration upon himself and it has, by its very nature, a tremendous power to interior healing.*

*All of this impresses on us the importance of developing a grateful spirit and shows us the potential destructiveness of an ungrateful spirit. A spirit of gratefulness deepens our relationship with God; it increases our mental well-being and helps us to be happier people.*

St. Paul exhorts us: *"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks"* (1Thessalonians 5:16-18). Does this mean that we are supposed to thank God for the painful and evil things that happen to us? Surely God does not expect or want us to give thanks for the evil things that happen to us or others. But we can and should thank God for his presence and help in times of evil and pain. We can thank God for helping us to get through the tough times. We can also give thanks to God for the way he is able to bring good out of evil. No doubt all of us can tell stories of how God turned the tables on evil and used a bad event to teach us some valuable lesson or bring us closer to him.

In all this, we need to be aware that one danger in this form of prayer is repression of unpleasant emotions. We may first need to grieve the losses we suffer or feel and then express our feelings of anger and frustration before we praise God and open our hearts to the joy and peace that this brings with it.

### Reflection Questions

1. Do you tend to look at the cup that is half full or half empty? Do you tend to look at what is good and positive about life? Or do you tend to look at what is missing and absent? If you are an optimist, do you tend to repress the bad stuff that happens to you and others?
2. When bad things happen, do you try to look at what is still good about your life without minimizing the hurt and pain of the bad things?
3. "Grateful people are usually happy people. Grumblers are always miserable." Agree?
4. Can you see that the failure to thank God for life's blessings could lead us to feel that God is absent from our lives?

5. Each day has 86,400 seconds. Have you used 10 of them today to think and express grateful thoughts? I don't know who wrote the following piece, but I like it.

### I Am Thankful . . .

- ... For the wife who says "It's hot dogs tonight," because she is home with me, not with someone else.
- ... For the teenager who is complaining about doing dishes, because that means she is at home and not on the streets.
- ... For the taxes that I pay, because it means that I am employed.
- ... For the mess to clean after a party, because it means that I have been surrounded by friends.
- ... For the clothes that fit a little too snug, because it means I have enough to eat.
- ... For my shadow that watches me work, because it means I am out in the sunshine.
- ... For a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and gutters that need fixing, because it means I have a home.
- ... For all the complaining I hear about the government, because it means that we have freedom of speech.
- ... For the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot, because it means I am capable of walking and that I have been blessed with transportation.
- ... For my huge heating bill, because it means I am warm.
- ... For the lady behind me in church that sings off key, because it means that I can hear.
- ... For the pile of laundry and ironing, because it means I have clothes to wear.
- ... For weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day, because it means I have been capable of working hard.
- ... For the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours, because it means that I am alive.
- And finally... For too much e-mail, because it means I have friends who are thinking of me.

### THANKS BE TO GOD

*I do not thank thee, Lord, that I have bread to eat while others starve;*

*Nor yet for work to do while empty hands solicit heaven;  
Nor a body strong while other bodies flatten beds of pain.*

*No, not for these do I give thanks!*

*But I am grateful, Lord, because my meager loaf I may divide;  
for that my busy hands may move to meet another's need;  
because my doubled strength I may expend to steady one who faints. Yes, for all these do I give thanks!*

*For heart to share, desire to bear and will to lift, flamed into one by deathless Love - Thanks be to God for this!  
Unspeakable! His Gift!*

- Janie Alford

## A story about gratitude

Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*Thanks to the book Schindler's Ark, and the film, Schindler's List, the name Oskar Schindler became known to millions of people around the world. Schindler was a German industrialist. During World War II he saved over a thousand Polish Jews from the concentration camps. As the war ended the Germans pulled out of Poland, and the people awaited the arrival of the Russians. Just before the Russians arrived, Schindler too decided to flee westwards.*

*When his Jewish workers, now free, heard he was leaving they got together to see how they could express their gratitude to him. All that was at hand to make a gift was base metal. Then one of them suggested something better. He opened his mouth to show his gold bridgework.*

*"Take this," he said. "Were it not for Oskar, the SS would have had the stuff anyway. My teeth would be a heap in some SS warehouse, along with the golden fangs of many others."*

*At first the others resisted the man's offer but he insisted. So he had his bridgework extracted by a prisoner who had once been a dentist in Cracow. A jeweler among them melted the gold down and fashioned a ring out of it. On the inner circle of the ring they inscribed these words from the Talmud: "The one who saves a single life, saves the entire world."*

*It was an astonishing and deeply moving gesture of gratitude. That is one of the marvelous things about gratitude—it makes us want to give something back. "Gratitude is the heart's memory" (French Proverb). But then someone might say that it was the least they could do since they owned their lives to Schindler. The ten lepers in the Gospel also owed their lives to Jesus; yet only one of them came back to thank him.*

*It seems strange that the one who came back to give thanks was an outsider—a Samaritan. But isn't that how it often is? The insider takes everything for granted, and is taken for granted too. The outsider, on the other hand, sees everything as a gift. We find the same thing in the First Reading. We see the foreigner, Naaman, coming back to thank Elisha for curing his leprosy.*

*We are better at demanding gratitude than at giving it. This indicates how selfish much of our giving can be. If anyone finds his brother ungrateful, it is not the other person's happiness he is seeking, but his own.*

*Jesus demanded gratitude, but not for himself. What he said was, "Has no one come back to give praise to God except this foreigner?" From this it's clear that he wasn't thinking of himself. He was thinking of the lepers. It is a good and necessary thing for the recipient of a favour to be able to show gratitude.*

*It is very important for us to be able to express thanks. It's good for ourselves in the first place—it forces us to acknowledge the debt we owe to others. And of course it's*

*good for the other person—it makes him/her feel appreciated. The person who does not give thanks for little, does not give thanks for much. Hence, the importance of being grateful for, and appreciating, the small favours done and services rendered every day.*

*As for expressing gratitude to God: God doesn't need our thanks, but we need to thank God. It reminds us that everything we have we owe to him. It's easy to be grateful to God for the good things that happen to us. But we must try to be grateful for all of our lives—the bad as well as the good, the sorrows and the joys, the failures and successes. This is no easy task. We can truly call ourselves grateful people only when we can say thanks for everything that has brought us to this moment. This kind of gratitude enables us to reclaim our whole past, and to see it as the concrete way in which God has led us to this moment.*

*When we look back over our lives, we see that the things that hurt us and the things which helped us cannot be separated from each other. We must try to see the guiding hand of a loving God in all that has brought us to where we are now.*

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Fr. Denis McBride, C.S.S.R., writes:

## A faith which thanks

*Probably the nine lepers were appreciative of what Jesus had done; we don't know, however, why they never bothered to show their gratitude to Jesus. We can only look to ourselves to ask why we are often reluctant to say thank you. Sometimes it is because we resent the fact that we needed help in the first place; sometimes we are suspicious of good Samaritans and wonder about their motives. Whatever the reason for our own ingratitude, we know that it diminishes us and those who help us. Ingratitude makes the bill for helping people hard to pick up.*

*Eucharist means "thanks." When we gather here each Sunday we come to eucharist God in the midst of the assembly. We do what Naaman and the Samaritan leper did: we give praise to God and give thanks for his chosen ones who have graced us with their help. We do not want our thanks chained up inside us; we do not want our gratitude a prisoner that cannot go free? If God's news cannot be chained up, we know that our response to it can. Let our thanks find expression in this eucharist, and perhaps we could all surprise someone this week with a note that is long overdue and which says thanks.*

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Have a blessed week,

*Le Saran*