

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2019

The readings of this Sunday talk about faith and gratitude. They show that faith can obtain us many blessings from the Lord when we trust in his healing power. They also invite us to be grateful to God anytime he blesses us and visits us.

The first reading describes the story of the healing of Naaman, the Syrian. The story is related to the leprosy that Naaman had and which pushed him to travel to Israel in search for healing.

It described also the healing that happened when Elisha recommended him to go and wash in the Jordan River. It shows how from that washing he was healed and went back to the prophet and brought him gifts as a sign of his gratitude. It equally shows the refusal of the prophet to accept the gifts and the confession of the uniqueness of the God of Israel and his worship by Naaman.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is not only the God of Israel, but of all the peoples of the earth. Therefore, anyone of those who look for him, whatever might be his background or origin, can receive his blessing. Another idea is the truth that where human efforts fail to bring us consolation, God can provide healing and cure because he is the master of the destiny of people and individuals. Finally, the text invites us to be sensitive to the reality of gratitude toward God anytime we receive a blessing from him.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus heals the ten lepers. The Gospel starts by mentioning the trip that Jesus was taking to Jerusalem via Samaria and Galilee.

It says that as he was entering a village, ten lepers met him and asked for healing. It gives the reaction of Jesus who sent them to show up to the priests according to the recommendation of the Law of Moses. It equally shows how while they were on their way they were healed and only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank Jesus.

The Gospel finishes with Jesus' astonishment and the assurance to that simple one that his faith has saved him.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the duty of gratitude. In the Gospel, Jesus is wondering why the nine other lepers did not come back to thank him while they were also healed like that foreigner. In order to understand the importance of Jesus' question, we have to bear in mind that in the ancient world leprosy was a very bad disease. It had no cure. Most of the times, it was seen as a punishment or a consequence of sins that someone has committed in his life.

The disease itself was very devastating. In addition to the fact that it destroyed completely the body of the sick, it also put him civilly and religiously out of the normal functioning of society. That is why any time that someone was cured, the Law of Moses recommended that he show up to the priests so that they give witness of his healing.

What is particular in the case of the ten lepers is the fact that Jesus sent them to show up to the priests even before they were healed. Such a doing shows that Jesus has anticipated their healing; he knew very well they would be cured before they arrived there.

Their healing, indeed, had a double sense. In fact, by healing they recovered the physical integrity of their body and at the same time they were reintegrated into society by enjoying all the privileges they did not have before. With such goodness shown to them and the favors received, they should be grateful enough by giving thankful appreciation to Jesus who allowed that to happen to them.

That is why beyond the problem of healing itself that we all need for ourselves, Jesus wants to awaken us to the reality of the human condition. In fact, life is fragile and surrounded by many limitations. We need God in order to restore us to full health and to the integrity of our body. Moreover, left alone without the intervention and the presence of so many people around us, life is very precarious.

For instance, without the help of our parents who took care of us, we would not be who we are today. Without the gentle attention of our doctors who care for us when we are sick, we would be lost. Without the effort of our teachers who have opened our eyes to the reality of the world, we would have remained blind. Without the friendship of so many people who care for us, life would be very difficult. Without the love of our spouses and the members of our families, life would be miserable, etc.

Jesus gives us, then, an opportunity to think about all those people without whom our life would be miserable and how we have to be thankful for their existence for our life. That is why by raising the question of nine lepers who did not come back to show their thankful appreciation, Jesus is warning us against ingratitude.

Against the tendency of taking things for granted, Jesus reminds us that gratitude is a duty we should all have in our hearts. Of course, it is true that sometimes we feel incapable of repaying what has been done to us; but the tragedy is that we often do not even try to repay it.

Moreover, we should not forget that the first of the gifts we receive in the world is life itself. As such, life originates in God who has created the world and everything in it. Our life is a gift from God. If so, we have to be thankful to God that he has given us life through our parents. This is something we have to take seriously, because there is a tendency to take things for granted or to minimize the impact of God in our life, as though everything depended on us and on our strength.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to be grateful to God for all the blessings we receive in this life from his hand. Let us offer him our sickness so that he may heal us physically, emotionally and spiritually. Let us ask him to help us remain faithful and persevering, especially in the moments of difficulties and sufferings. May God bless you all!

2 Kings 5: 14-17; 2 Timothy 2: 8-13; Luke 17: 11-19



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