

Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time C2022

Let me start today's homily with a reference to an experience of life. In one of the parishes I worked, the pastor and I had the custom of celebrating the Holy Mass at the occasion of the feast of Thanksgiving.

At that Mass we were not used to preach, but rather inviting the people to come forward to share with the congregation what they are thankful for in their lives. For sure, those who had the courage to talk cited many things for which they were thankful. Others were reserved and did not want to share. Still others, considering their situation and for some reasons, did not see what they would be thankful for.

In the end, it came to my perception that when it is about the question of gratitude, there are three types of people. Those who are sensitive to the blessings they have in life and are thankful. Those who certainly have been blessed, but take it for granted. Such categories of people tend mostly to emphasize their hard work, abilities and skills. They believe that what they have is the result of their hard work and skills.

Perhaps the nine healed lepers of the Gospel, who did not return, belong to that category. They may have travelled from afar in order to come to Jesus or they were courageous persons who did not listen to the prejudices about their disease from people, but went to Jesus anyway. Therefore, they got what they deserve or they deserve what they got. The third group is of those who, because of negative experiences of life, think that they have nothing to be thankful for.

In today's Gospel through the parable of the ten lepers, Jesus invites us to open our eyes in recognizing that everything we have and are, is God's gift to us. For that reason we have to be thankful to him. Only one leper, a Samaritan, meaning a pagan, understood it while the nine others did not.

The healing of these lepers is very important and teaches us something of God we have to highlight. First, we have to know that at the time of Jesus leprosy was an incurable disease. The sick having it was excluded from the Temple and the participation in the life of society. Given that Israel was a religious society, anyone healed had to show himself to the priests so that they attest his cure and allow his reintegration in society.

In that context, by healing the lepers, Jesus shows that he is the God who makes the impossible possible. With him human beings can receive both physical and spiritual integrity. With him they can recover the integrity of their body and at the same time they are reintegrated into society by enjoying all the privileges they did not have before. Such goodness shown to them and the favors received should generate in them enough gratitude 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.

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.

Now, what can increase in us the virtue of gratitude? I believe it is humility and simplicity. All those who are prideful are among the ungrateful. They think that they need nobody for their life to be meaningful. They think that they have enough resources, enough strength and skills that they are in need of anything or anybody.

That was the problem with Naaman in the first reading. He thought that he could not ridicule himself to the point of washing in the Jordan as Elisha was asking him to do. He thought that his country had better water than what the prophet suggested. But, when he humbled himself and obeyed the prophet everything changed, he was healed.

As you can see, God will not ask us extraordinary things to do for our salvation. What is required of us is as simple as it is close to the ridicule, namely accepting to be washed with water through the sacrament of baptism, to kneel before the priest and confess that I am not a perfect person, to line up with humility and devotion to go to communion, knowing that what I receive is the Lord Jesus himself. But when we do it with devotion and faith, we are healed in body and our spirit.

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!

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



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