

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Why do people say “thank you?” Why do people not say “thank you?”

When we imagine the ten lepers discovering that they had been cured, it could be that they were so overjoyed that they ran as fast as they could to go hug their spouses and children whom they may not have seen in years.

Leprosy was like that. If you were caught with a skin disease of any kind, you had to live in a camp outside the town with other lepers.

Sometimes the skin disease cleared up by itself, and if that happened, you could go to the priest who would look at it to make sure it was gone and then declare you clean.

Once you were declared clean, you could go back and live in town with your family again.

Sometimes, the disease did not clear up on its own, and then, you lived the rest of your life outside the camp.

Your family could visit you, but they would have to keep their distance. You couldn't really be with them.

So, let's just imagine that the lepers who were cured had been living away from their families for a while. I don't think we could give them too much trouble for wanting to go home and celebrate.

I don't think Jesus was actually mad at the nine that did not come back to thank him.

He never told them that they had to. He just told them to go and show themselves to the priests so that they could be declared clean.

They were going to be healed whether they thanked Jesus or not.

What surprises Jesus the most is that the one who does come back and thank him is the one you'd least expect.

The one Samaritan in the group, the one who had the most against the Jews, is the one who came back and thanked Jesus.

And not only did he thank him, he threw himself at Jesus' feet and glorified God in a loud voice.

He made a big deal of it.

Jesus tells him then that his faith has saved him.

Apparently, thanking God and having faith go together.

We might jump to the conclusion that the Samaritan leper's faith is the reason why he was healed.

But the story does not really say that. The story says that all ten were healed.

The faith of the Samaritan is what made the connection between healing

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and glorifying God and the person of Jesus.

The Samaritan's faith saved him because through it he came to recognize Jesus as someone worth taking the trouble to thank.

And because of that, he went away with a more profound experience of salvation that even being healed of leprosy.

Giving thanks led him to a deeper experience of God than simply receiving a cure.

We don't often think of saying thank you as something that is good for us.

It seems more like something we do for others.

But to be grateful, and to show our gratitude has benefits for us. God is going to do what God does whether we thank him or not.

We can get away with not thanking him if we want to. But what happens if we do that is that we never really get to know God better?

We get stuck. Our faith dies. We don't move forward.

But if we take the trouble to say "thank you," and to truly cultivate a spirit of gratitude, we are saved in a way that goes beyond healing.

We come to the knowledge of God's love that would escape us otherwise.

The great 13th c. mystic Meister Eckhart once wrote, "If the only prayer we ever prayed was to say "thank you" that would be enough.

That one action and attitude opens a world of salvation for us.