

## 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ingratitude deters a person from giving again. If you helped someone in your family, contributed to a charitable cause, or gave up your time for the sake of another, and no one said thanks, you may feel used and unwilling to help again.

Apparently Jesus in his humanity felt the same temptations. When only one healed leper returned to say thanks, he raised an eyebrow over the other nine. If one of us had worked that miracle and received such a tepid response, we'd probably mutter to ourselves, "Well, that's the last time I'll help lepers."

The lectionary pairs this reading with a similar one from the Old Testament. In the Second Book of Kings, we hear about Naaman, a valiant army commander now afflicted with leprosy and unable to find a cure. Naaman came from Syria. He was not Jewish, but his wife numbered among her servants a Jewish girl familiar with the wonders Elisha the prophet had worked. Naaman's king wrote a letter to Elisha's king, asking for help, but Elisha's king thought this was a trap. Elisha, confident in God's power, encouraged his king to let Naaman come. So he did. The prophet Elisha then told the leper Naaman to wash himself seven times in the river Jordan. Naaman took offense at this idea; he was expecting a different healing in which the prophet would invoke his God and wave a hand over the spot. Naaman thought the rivers of Syria were as good as the Jordan, so he turned on his heels to leave. But his servants prevailed on him to give it a go. He would have done something extraordinary; why not try something ordinary?

That's where today's reading picks up. Naaman, perhaps intending to show how ridiculous this was, washed himself seven times in the Jordan, and, to his utter surprise, it cured him. He insisted on giving Elisha a gift, but the prophet refused. So instead of giving, Naaman took some of the earth from Elisha's land, so that when he returned home to Syria, he could worship Elisha's God.

In the first reading Elisha heals one leper; in the gospel Jesus heals ten. In the reading the leper is an outcast Gentile; in the gospel the thankful leper is an outcast Samaritan. In the reading the cure prompts faith; in the gospel the cure prompts thanks. Both readings imply that God appreciates hearing words of thanks.

Our word "eucharist" comes from the Greek word for "thanks". The eucharistic prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving and consecration. First it is right to give God thanks and praise. Then we ask for what we need.

During the eucharistic prayer the Church helps us call to mind reasons for giving thanks. Each of us can profitably use this lengthy prayer to think over the blessings we receive in this time and place. Just as we like to hear words of thanks when we do something nice for others, God likes to hear words of thanks from us.

Even if, like the nine lepers, we do not say thanks, our blessings do not cease. God never says, "That's the last time I'll help you." In munificence, God continues to pour out blessings upon us, even if we show ingratitude. We are called to do the same. If people do not express thanks to us, that does not excuse us from helping them again. God calls us to imitate his generosity at all times, and when we receive from his bounty, we ought to say thanks.

Sunday, October 9, 2022