

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer: Almighty God, whose mercies are new every morning and whose goodness, though undeserved, still abundantly provides for all our wants of body and soul, grant us, we humbly pray, Your Holy Spirit that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness towards us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴When he saw them he said to them, "**Go and show yourselves to the priests.**" And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus answered, "**Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?**" ¹⁹And he said to him, "**Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.**"

The Sermon

How many of you remember the old "Lone Ranger" series – either on TV – or on the radio? Do you remember the masked man on the white horse – the "Hi – Ho – Silver – away!" – the faithful Native American companion Tonto – the silver bullets? Remember how good always triumphed over evil?

And innocent people – victimized by bad guys – were always saved. The Lone Ranger and Tonto were always good guys – because they wore white. The bad guys wore black and they rode black horses. The show

usually ended with the Lone Ranger and Tonto moving on to other adventures – riding off into the glorious sunset.

They left behind some grateful but very bewildered people who would say things like: “Who was that masked man? Why, he left before we could even thank him!” Every show was the same. The Lone Ranger appeared – a complete stranger. He helped people he didn’t even know – simply because they needed help.

And he left when his work was done. The Lone Ranger’s help didn’t depend on thanks. In contrast to the Lone Ranger – today’s Gospel seems to place heavy emphasis upon the “thank you.” The healing miracle is like so many others scattered throughout the Gospels: Jesus speaks the powerful word and ten lepers are healed.

But then St. Luke introduces a twist. One of the ten returns to Jesus to say “thank you.” And Jesus responds: “*Weren’t **ten men** made clean? Where are the other nine?*” (v. 17) Now, if we stop with this outburst, it might seem that Jesus – God’s Son – is a capricious old grump whose giving depends upon being thanked.

But is this what St. Luke intends? Looking further into this text, we find that after asking where the other nine are – Jesus tells the leper who returned: “*Get up and go home. Your faith has made you well.*” (v. 19) Now, **this** doesn’t **suggest** that the other nine weren’t healed. Indeed, they **were** healed.

Nor does this amount to a pay-off in thanks for the lepers’ cure. No, the leper’s “thanks” **is part of the cure itself.** It is the logical outcome – in praise – for the gift given to him. For this leper who returns – the words of thanks – complete the healing.

And so we discover that giving thanks is **costly!** Gratitude may be a very ethical and a very religious emotion. But it is also one of the most difficult of emotions to express. We must understand what the leper was thanking Jesus **for.**

Since long before Jesus’ time – leprosy was thought to be contagious. That’s why the ten lepers kept their distance from Jesus in the beginning – shouting “Unclean! Unclean!” whenever anyone approached – and ringing a

tinkling bell in the fog or in the dark. But leprosy isn't contagious in that sense. It thrives on poverty and malnutrition. Leprosy creates a loss of feeling in the fingers and toes – in the hands and feet. Leprosy disfigures the face – which is why lepers so often wore a veil.

Leprosy renders its victims unable to feel pain. So – curing leprosy – is restoring the ability to feel pain – to know when the body is threatened by outside dangerous forces. The leper returned to thank Jesus for giving back his pain. And that's not an easy thing to do.

Maybe that's why the other nine didn't return. The cost may have seemed too great. Maybe they weren't so thankful anymore the first time they stepped on a thorn – or stubbed their foot – or hit their crazy bone like Brett Favre did last weekend on the gridiron – or got stung by a fire ant or a yellowjacket or a wasp. But no matter how much it hurt him to do so – **one** leper came back – and his words of thanks completed his healing.

As a nation – and as individuals – we have been given many and varied gifts. As a nation – we have been given freedom and liberty unrivaled in the history of this world. As individuals – we have been given the forgiveness of sins and eternal life and salvation by the Sacrifice of God's Son on a Cross. They are ours regardless of how we respond. They are ours regardless of how we have lived. By God's grace – an undeserved love which allowed that one leper to return to Jesus – by God's grace – we also have the power to complete the giving.

We can say those words which – although so very simple – are enough. "Thank you, Lord." May God help us to say it – as a nation – and as individuals. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!