

TWO WORDS, BUT SO IMPORTANT

The Gospel for this Sunday is one almost everyone is familiar with. As Christ was approaching a small village, he is met by a group of ten lepers, total outcasts of society. It is most likely that they did not have leprosy as we know it today, Hansen's disease, which in modern times can now be controlled and people suffering from this disease no longer have to be isolated. But there are no end of various skin disorders which still plague people everywhere and which can so easily disfigure a person's total appearance, and which in most cases can be quite contagious. Thus this small band of ten stayed off at a distance and called to Christ to help them. Christ knew their problem and knew that not only did they suffer from the disease but even more so did they suffer from total isolation, that they were truly outcasts. And so as always Christ was touched to the heart and he called out to them to go to the priests and be certified that they were healed. Many skin disorders do disappear in time and so this was the way outcasts could become reinstated into the community. Christ's cure did not take effect immediately but along their way to the Priests. Their joy must have been overwhelming as they realized their cure and realized also that they could once again be a part of their community and their families. And so they continued on to the priests.

However, there was one among them who not only realized what Christ had done but was instantly aware that he simply had to go immediately to thank Christ for this miracle. This man was not a Jew but a Samaritan, an infidel in the eyes of the Jews yet he too was equally cured as were his Jewish friends. Not being of the Jewish faith he did not feel the urgency to go to the Priests as the other nine did. Rather his true human spirit came to the fore and he just had to return immediately to thank Christ and then he would go to the priests. The others went to the priests but then never returned to thank the Lord. It is interesting to note that after the Samaritan had so fervently and so joyfully thanked Christ, that then Christ noted to his disciples that while ten had been cured only one had returned to thank him and to believe in him, and he adds in amazement that it was the unbeliever who did this, not the other nine believers.

No doubt Christ must have also remembered the Old Testament story of how Naaman, the unbeliever, had been cured of a serious skin disorder by the great prophet Elisha. Naaman was very high up in the Babylonian empire when he contacted some dreadful skin disorder and didn't know what to do. It was a young Jewish slave girl who suggested he go to Israel and seek out the prophet Elisha. Reluctantly he went and found him only to be told to go wash in the river Jordan. The prophet did not even come out of his hut to speak to Naaman face to face. Naaman refused to wash in the Jordan, that muddy stream while in his country they had the great Euphrates and Tigris rivers. But his friends convinced him to follow the prophet's words and so he did and to his surprise was instantly cured. His first thought was to return to Elisha and thank him profusely and offer him gifts in gratitude, which Elisha refused to accept. He just told him to thank the Lord for the cure. But stubborn Naaman left his gifts there anyway, but did take a load of Jewish soil so that he could offer thanks to the god of Israel in his own country on land sanctified by the Jewish God. He realized who really cured his affliction.

There are any number of places in the Scriptures where people offer thanks to God for answering their prayers, but perhaps it is in book of psalms where gratitude becomes quite obvious, as the

psalms are biblical songs and prayers of petition, but perhaps more often of praise and thanksgiving to God for all he has done for humans. Prayers of thanksgiving have always been a part of the Catholic Church liturgies down through the ages since the time of Christ. Every Mass that is offered contains words of thanks sprinkled throughout the liturgy. But so many never reflect on all that is said by the priest at the Altar.

The question one should ask themselves is just how often does one reflect on what has happened in their lives, what is happening in their lives and what they hope will be happening in the future. While this implies prayers of petition, it should also imply prayers of thanksgiving. Almost no one reflects on just how much God is really a part of every person's life. For most people, life is fairly much a simple routine. There is the home life, the life where one works, and then the broader life of the world around one's self. And this daily routine is sometimes broken by a guest for dinner, an event that one attends either for the school where the children attend, or something in the parish, or by simply breaking the routine to have some sort of variety in one's life. But there is something else going on in everyone's life which almost no one ever thinks about, and that is the fact that there is such a thing as Divine Providence. We believe that God does watch over us and we also believe that each of us has a Guardian Angel. But do these beliefs really have a meaning in one's life? The answer to that from almost everyone will be no! These are simply beliefs which are wonderful for children but for adults are meaningless.

Stop for a moment and think of how often during any given week, or even on most days, there are things that happen which somehow affect our lives, but we chalk them up simply to good luck or just happenstance. It was that car which barely missed hitting us - were we lucky! It was finding that lost item in the most unexpected place - again what luck! And even meeting a friend whom one has not seen for some time, what a pleasant surprise, what luck! One can find countless examples in their lives of just these kinds of happenings which come out of the blue and seemingly have no conscious thought behind them. They just simply happen! Life is like that! Full of surprises, full of much luck.

But if when such an occurrence does happen and one then consciously says "Thank you God!" then over a relatively short period of time one begins to see just how often God's hand is actually in their lives, is truly behind so many sudden happenings. And then before one knows it one finds themselves talking quietly to God beyond just saying thank you. And then one is off and running as they begin to realize just how close God is to them. One's faith becomes alive and real; one's trust in God grows. And one's joy of and in their faith grows. And the effect this has on others is beyond comprehension. It all starts with a simple, thank you!

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