

Homily of Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

The readings of today invite us to reflect on the importance of gratitude. When Naaman bathed in the River Jordan as directed by Elisha, “he was cleansed of his leprosy.” He was grateful to God and returned to Elisha with a gift to express his gratitude. Naaman was Syrian. Syria, then, was considered a pagan territory because they were Baal worshippers. Naaman said to Elisha, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant.” Ironically, this happened during the last years of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, and their children who led the Israelites to idolatry. While the Chosen People were ungrateful to God by worshipping pagan gods, Naaman the Syrian expressed gratitude to God and proclaimed, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.”

In the Gospel, Jesus healed ten lepers. Nine were Jews, and one was a Samaritan. Again, the nine Jews who were healed did not return to Jesus to express gratitude. The Samaritan did. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans as pagans and foreigners. Yet, it was the ‘pagan’ (the foreigner) “who returned [to Jesus] to give thanks to God.” The Jews took their healing for granted. Many times, we take our blessings for granted by not showing appreciation.

There is a saying that ingratitude is the worst of vices. This is because every vice is rooted in ingratitude to God. For example, when I don’t forgive those who offend me, I am ungrateful to God who forgives me all the time. We are invited today to live life of gratitude: gratitude to God and gratitude to fellow human beings. We are invited to limit our complaints, fault finding, whining, and nagging, and to increase our gratefulness, appreciation and thanks.

St Paul urges us, “Give thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus to God the Father” (Ephesians 5:20). “In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Gospel of today emphasizes the importance of gratitude: “And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, ‘Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?’ Then he said to him, ‘Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.’” The Psalmist says, “Those who offer praise as a sacrifice honor me.” Giving gratitude to God is a recognition that all we have is a gift from God (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Jesus spoke harshly to his people due to their ingratitude. He scolded them, “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, ‘Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.’”

Ingratitude can be very costly. In the Old Testament, the journey of forty days became forty years for the Israelites due to their ingratitude, and the ungrateful generations did not reach the Promised Land.

We can conclude with the following observations:

Expression of gratitude is a prayer in itself that God gives us more opportunities to thank him.

Expression of gratitude encourages, enlivens and empowers. Lack of gratitude discourages and diminishes.

Expression of gratitude is uplifting and promotes healthy environment. Ingratitude is sickening, and creates anxiety, stress, aches and pains.

Expression of gratitude is delightful. Ingratitude is repulsive.

Expression of gratitude brings more blessings. Ingratitude takes away blessings. The second reading says, “If we deny him, he will deny us.” May this not be our portion. Amen.

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