

**28th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 10, 2010
10 Am Liturgy**

“Where are the other nine?” Were they just too pre-occupied? Too astounded? Too self-centered? Too busy? Too lazy? All of the above? None of the above? What happened? We may never know. But we do learn today that they missed an even more astounding opportunity than the minor miracle that cleansed them.

There is one obvious theme in two of today’s readings. They both speak of the importance of gratitude. Many people, like our infamous nine, find it extremely hard simply to say: thank you.

In my experience, both clinical and pastoral, I find that the problem is often that people habitually tend to view their milk-bottle of gifts as always half-empty. They have things they know they could be thankful for, but there is just so much more they could have. “If only...” More money, better looks, more friends, a better job, maybe just any job, and on goes the list.

There is just too much *more* that some people want. So it becomes increasingly hard to say thanks for what they do have.

But the story in today's gospel suggests that the ability to say thanks is itself a remarkable gift. And it is one that brings even greater blessings than we might have imagined.

In the gospel story, the Samaritan leper is not only cured of his leprosy, he is healed—much more profoundly than he ever could have imagined. And the one who returns to say thank you, is the only one who gets to hear the blessed and confusing words: “Go now, your faith has saved you.” St. Luke, always meticulously careful in his choice of words, uses three different words in Greek to convey the subtle differences between curing, cleansing, and healing (*iaomai, therapeuo, katharizo*). All ten are cleansed; only one is healed, deeply and profoundly healed, in the depths of his soul.

Let's turn for a moment to the Syrian leper in the Second Book of Kings. Naaman is a very important man. He is the commander of the king's army. But he has leprosy. He has already searched everywhere in Syria for a cure for his leprosy.

But he has now heard of the Jewish King and their new Jewish God. Elisha, the Jewish prophet, tells him to go wash seven times in the Jordan. It will be that simple.

In the pericope before the one we read today, Naaman is expecting Elisha to demand some onerous task, something exotic, in order to be cured. And he gets quite put-out when he is asked to simply wash in the Jordan. Actually, the scripture tell us he is quite angry and enraged. The Jordan, to him, is like a stagnant, muddy stream. Syria has many more powerful and cleaner rivers, he bellows. He could have just washed in one of them! He wants his cure to be more significant, more demonstrable, and more difficult. His milk-bottle demands an exotic filling!

But, lo and behold, here he is now with baby's skin all in tact! And he didn't have to do anything extraordinary at all! He is enormously grateful to Elisha and won't let him alone until he even packs-up his dirt, Jewish dirt, to take home to Syria. He, too, has discovered something much bigger than a cure. He has discovered the God of Israel, and life will never be the same again. He, too, is healed.

Both the Samaritan leper and Naaman radically change the way they look at what they do have to be grateful for. Their milk-bottles now seem much more than half-full. As the PBS resident guru, Dr. Wayne Dyer keeps reminding us: “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

And as Anton Boisen, the founder of the Clinical Pastoral Education movement in America, reminded us decades ago: “One can never be grateful and depressed at the same time.”

Gratitude is more than a social nicety. It is the foundation of healthy living—both psychologically and spiritually. Yes, we all have hurdles—sometimes immense ones—to deal with in life. But there is always “something more” we already have that cries-out for thanksgiving. So much for homily number one!

But there are so many more homilies in today’s readings. Think of the fact of leprosy itself and what it represents, literally to the ancient peoples, and figuratively to us. Whom do we still dread as unclean in our own worlds?

Think of the fact that both lepers in today’s stories are foreigners, people “from a strange land.” And neither of them

even belongs to our own faith, or professes our religion. What does this suggest about respect for other peoples and other religious traditions? It is apparent that healing knows no religion for God. Outcasts all! Homilies number two and three!

Another little homily I had to preach about today is occasioned by the terrifying spate of gay teen suicides and renewed gay assaults through our country last week. Bullying and bigotry still go hand-in-hand and are, quite apparently, alive and well in our society—and, of course, in our church. On what side does God come down? Today's answer could not be clearer.

So there are, in fact, many homilies today. Pick one for yourself. Ask who your own lepers are? Ask who remains “the foreigner” for you? They most likely won't be the obvious ones (people of different races, ethnic groups, probably not even sexual minorities in our community). But foreigners and lepers will be there—somewhere in each one of us. Foreign lepers still stalk our church, our nation, our world. Who are those whom we can and do still bully? Who remain foreign and strange to us? And do we even know why?

So, by all means, be grateful for all you have and are. But be also challenged today by all that still frightens you deep in your own heart. And do not let yourself be one of the sad ones who will be haunted by Jesus' question: "Where are the other nine?"