



## **A Homily by The Right Reverend Susan J.A. Bell**

Sunday, October 11, 2020

Scripture Passages: Deuteronomy 8:7-18 & Luke 17:11-19

*+ In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Sometimes when I'm having a little trouble calming my mind and heart in order to pray, I fall back on a kind of prayer called The Examen. I first came across it many years ago when reading about the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola. I have always found it helpful and so very appealing because it's foundation is in gratitude.

The Examen is a way to think about and give thanks for how God walks with us every day. You see, St. Ignatius had this conviction that God speaks to us through our deepest feelings and longings. And he called these feelings "consolations" and "desolations."

Consolations are the things that bring us close to God. They are the things that fill us with life, give us joy and make us feel that all is right in the world.

The Desolations are the opposite: these are things that pull us away from our God, alienate us from others, and drain life from us.

Both are important. Both teach us something about ourselves, the Lord and how we pass through this life faithfully.

But for me the greatest importance of this way of praying is that the prayer itself begins with some version of "what moment do I feel most grateful to God for today?" or "when did I feel God close to me today?"

I think that's an important way to start praying because gratitude, or thanksgiving is pretty central to Christian spirituality. The meaning of the word Eucharist itself is thanksgiving! It is a meal of thanksgiving to God for redeeming our lives through Jesus' work on the cross.

So I reckon thinking about our lives through the lens of gratitude to God and seeking God's desires for our lives - and following that path where it leads, is a pretty faithful way of leading an authentic life - a life where we are in touch with our ourselves and in touch with who and where God wants us to be. It means, trying to walk with God all the time. That doesn't mean it's easy or even super pleasant some of the time. For instance, I know that if I live with that kind of honesty, I may have to take some decisions and turns that might be hard, but ultimately they'll be true and right.

I suppose because I carry this kind of prayer around with me, it really sprang to mind as I read the Gospel of the Ten Lepers for this morning - on this weekend dedicated to Thanks-giving.

So here's the thing about this story: it's so very human, isn't it? These 10 lepers were miraculously healed of disease and restored to their lives. And the healing - just so we understand how total and deep the healing is - was not simply the relief and release from a deadly skin disease. It was also the relief and release from isolation, from being cut out of community - literally being dead to their families, friends and community because leprosy was so contagious only total isolation could stop its spread. So they were brought to life again, restored to community again.

To be healed of all that probably that should have been enough for some of them at least to express thanks to Jesus.

But they didn't. Except one.

And it's fascinating the one who did in the end. The scripture says, "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

And he was a Samaritan."

This is significant enough to mention it. And that's because he was probably the one least likely on the face of it, to thank Jesus because there was a rift between Jews and Samaritans that made them cultural enemies.

So for him to return to Jesus - a Jew (!) - and acknowledge that he was the origin of the healing miracle, well it was even more remarkable. That must have been difficult to do. It must have been against every cultural expectation that he would do that. And it must have taken a combination of bravery and humility to do it.

What's great is that his gratitude is all about acknowledgement: acknowledgement that Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to the Father, is the reason for the healing the 10 receive. The Samaritan knew exactly from whom this healing had come. From God - through Jesus. This man totally got it.

Jesus, for his part, acknowledged that the Samaritan's faith – in God, through him, was why the man was made well.

Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

He was not simply cleansed like the other nine. There are fine distinctions in the language of this story that are deeply significant and give us clues to how we can be well too. He was made well by his faith.

What is it to be well? I think it's safe to say that being well is about thanksgiving – about acknowledging that all our blessings, all our healings, come from God. And it's to have faith in God's provision for our lives. To draw nearer to God through gratitude and to recognize God's hand is always in the goodness we experience. And to follow that goodness where it leads for our lives is faithfulness.

Sounds simple doesn't it? Almost linear and logical.

But I think the other nine lepers show us that it's not. Gratitude is not generally our fallback position as human beings. And if that is so in a culture that enjoys unprecedented peace and prosperity, it's even more difficult in the midst of a pandemic when that peace and prosperity is threatened and change and anxiety is all around. But if it is more difficult, it's also more important than ever.

Gratitude is like a beautiful plant that has to be cultivated; grown and watered with intentionality and care. Giving thanks to God; acknowledging that the source of all goodness is God, and that we have not come by it by our own power nor the strength of our own hands, is the path to faithfulness and authenticity.

So on this day dedicated to thanks-giving, let me give you some homework that will literally change your life.

Today, as you sit down to a meal of thanksgiving, spend some time thinking about what you feel grateful to God for – and give thanks – real thanks for that consolation. And later, when you have some quiet, meditate on that – and ask yourself, what might the Lord be wanting you to do in response to that consolation? And keep on repeating this kind of prayer. The answers and the path they present might just surprise you with joy.

And so may God bless you with joy and gratitude in all that you do.

*+In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*