

Beloved in Christ: Christ is among us!

Today we have heard of Jesus healing ten lepers, nine Jews and one Samaritan. Ordinarily Jews and Samaritans wouldn't mix but sickness brought them together. The Law of Moses offers a dire image of life for a leper, "The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp." (Leviticus 45:46) Wearing torn clothes, crying out "unclean" to everybody, living alone, isolated from everyone else. What a sorrowful existence. But these ten lepers at least had each other's company. They were not completely isolated. The disease even broke down the barrier between Samaritan and Jew. So, though afflicted, these ten men did enjoy the blessings of community.

When Jesus comes, rather than "unclean" these ten cry out to Jesus for mercy. According to the law Jesus sends them to the priests who can declare someone cleansed of the disease. And so, cleansed on their way, only one comes back to Jesus to say "thank you." The least expected one, the Samaritan, glorifies God and falls at Jesus' feet. Even Jesus remarks on this.

It seems that those who are in dire circumstances, bearing some test in their lives or difficulty, are ones who are able to see more clearly God at work in their lives. They see His sustaining hand, present with them through all sufferings. And they give thanks to Him more readily. Alcoholics Anonymous and other such programs based on it help those struggling with

addiction. And part of the steps they take include believing that a Power greater than ourselves, that is God, can restore us. And make the decision to turn our will and our lives over to God. Whether we struggle with alcohol or drugs or not, we all struggle against our fallen nature that inclines us to commit sin. Yet in the midst of it all, thanksgiving can be on our lips. As the ten lepers, even before their healing by Jesus, must have been thankful that at least they had each other. Job, afflicted with the loss of his flocks, his servants and the death of his children, is yet able to say "the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) Far more afflictions await Job than this and he agonizes over his suffering yet he does not condemn God. The Samaritan today and Job are people who give thanks to God, whether in good times or in bad. It is this act, giving thanks to Jesus, which shows the depth of the Samaritan's God-designed humanity.

If we do not give thanks to God, we get further and further away from Him. The act of giving thanks to God brings us into communion with Him. What we do here specifically every Sunday is to worship God, giving thanks to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we are invited to lift up our hearts to the Lord God, the priest then says, let us give thanks to the Lord, in Greek Εὐχαριστήσωμεν τῷ Κυρίῳ. Eucharist means to give thanks. The Liturgy is the Eucharistic Liturgy, the worship of thanks to God. As we celebrate now and every Sunday we give thanks to God "for all things of which we know and which we know not, whether manifest or unseen" and we thank Him "for this Liturgy which (He) has found worthy to accept" from us. We must gather together every Sunday to offer this

thanksgiving as a community of faith to be built up in communion with God and one another by this thanksgiving. We must not let our successes, our possessions, our blessings dull our minds so that we forget God. Rather let us keep the mind of the Samaritan who could thank God in his suffering and in his deliverance because God is always blessing us, blessings we see and know as well as blessings we do not see and do not know. Let us give thanks to the Lord here and now and every day in our prayers for all we see and know, for our food, a roof over our head, a warm bed, the blessing of each other, family and friends, and those we meet that our path may be straight, our life may be guarded, and our steps be made firm through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to Whom we always offer thanksgiving and worship.