

## Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Gratitude

Today's first reading and the Gospel reading are the ones that we usually pick for the Mass we celebrate on Thanksgiving Day. Naaman appreciated what the Lord had done for him through the prophet Elisha. He wanted to thank the prophet. More than this, he wanted to thank the God of Israel whom the prophet called upon to heal him. Along with his presents for Elisha, he brought soil from Israel home to Syria with him so that every day he could thank God on the soil of these chosen people.

Only one of the ten lepers returned to thank Jesus for curing him, and that one, like Naaman, was not a Jew, but he was a man of faith who realized that God needed to be thanked in the person of this Jesus, the Messiah.

The readings today talk about gratitude, the gratitude that Naaman the Syrian showed the prophet Elisha and the gratitude that one of the ten healed lepers showed the Lord. These were miraculous events. In both cases, lepers were cured and saved from a life of suffering and scorn. God's hand was experienced in tremendous, awe-inspiring ways. Gratitude should be given to God for his powerful intervention.

We need to thank God, not just for his intervention in the major events of our lives, but for our everyday lives. We should have gratitude to God for the people who love us and whom we love, for the happiness that we receive from others and are able to bring to others, for the joy of laughing over the antics of a child and those of a dear elderly senior.

We have so much for which to be thankful. Wherever you might live, there is a certain unique beauty to the areas of each of our homes. I could go on to talk about the beauties of the West Coast of Florida where I live, but I am sure that everyone can speak about the beauties of their native land.

We should thank God for his daily intervention in our lives.

I want to share with you a beautiful piece of wisdom that an elderly parishioner once shared with me. He said, "When I was young, and I drove somewhere and had to slam on my breaks to avoid an accident I would say, 'I was lucky that I wasn't killed.' Now that I am older I say, 'I am blessed that I was not killed.'"

That is the wisdom of a person who recognizes the hand of God in his life.

It seems that sometimes when we want something, and we pray to God for it, and our prayer is answered, we say, "I sure was lucky." For example, a young man prays to God that he meet a person to marry. He is invited to go to a party, but decides not to go. Then, at the last moment he changes his mind and goes to that party. And Sally Special is there. Years later, on a wedding anniversary, the man, no longer young, says "I sure was lucky that I decided to go to that party." Luck had nothing to do with it. God did. Or a lady may pray to God to help her with a sickness of unknown

cause. When a visiting physician at a hospital suggests a diagnosis that is successful, the lady says, "I sure was lucky that the visiting physician passed through this hospital." Again, luck has nothing to do with it. God does answer prayers. We need to thank God for his presence in our lives just as Naaman needed to thank him, just as all ten lepers needed to thank him.

A number of years ago I took a week vacation on the Caribbean Island of Barbados. Now, whenever I came upon someone who worked in the hotel I was staying, I would say hello and ask, "How are you today?" Instead of, "Fine, how are you?" I would always get the same answer. "I am blessed." the proper response from me would be, "As am I, thank God." We have to understand that we owe so much to God.

We are blessed. When we enter Church and say a prayer of greeting to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, we should always say, "Thank you, Lord." Thank you for my family, my spouse and children. Thank you for whatever health I might have. Thank you that the children are healthy and growing. Thank you for putting up with me. Thank you for getting me through another week. Thank you."

Giving thanks, expressing gratitude, is a learned action. Laughing when we are happy and crying when we are sad are natural responses, but saying "Thank you," has to be learned. That's what you parents always do with their little children, "What do you say to Aunt Jill for giving you that present?" "Thank you." We adults have to be reminded to say thank you too. That is one of the lessons of today's readings.

In a few moments we will be entering into the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means "to give thanks". We thank God for all He has done and is doing for us. We thank God for the prayers that have been answered the way we wish they would be answered, and for the prayers that have been answered in ways different than we have asked.

Perhaps it would be good for all of us to reflect today on the greatest blessings we have received in our lives, and thank God for each of them.