

Opening the Word: Salvific gratitude



We form our children from an early age to express gratitude. When we fetch them a cup of water and an afternoon snack, we teach them to say, “Thank you.” This, after all, is part of possessing good

manners.

As the child develops, of course, we hope that this thankfulness does not continue as a mere formality, a capitulation to social graces. We want our children to take up a disposition of gratitude, to recognize the gift of life itself.

As Christians, there is something about this formation into gratitude that resonates with us. We profess faith in a God who created simply because God wanted to share divine life with creation. We adore a God who entered into a covenant with Abraham, who rescued Israel from slavery and gave the Law as a gift.

Even when Israel ceased to obey this law, the Lord gave mercy. And in the fullness of time, God’s mercy became flesh, Jesus Christ. He loved unto the end, dying on the cross, as a sacrifice of love offered back to the Father.

[28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 13](#)

2 Kgs 5:14-17
Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
2 Tm 2:8-13
Lk 17:11-19

As a mentor of mine always says, “Christianity reveals that

the meaning of life is gratitude." Our weekly celebration of Christ's sacrifice is even called the great Eucharist, which means thanksgiving.

For all these reasons, we may approach the event of the 10 lepers in the Gospel of Luke as an enacted parable of gratitude. Like the Samaritan, we must learn to give thanks to God for all that we have received.

Still, perhaps there is more to the 10 lepers than we might initially notice. After all, the one who has come back to give thanks is the Samaritan.

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, we discover that the kingdom of God inaugurated by the "daybreak from on high" (Lk 1:78) is intended for all those who keep the Law. The neighbor is not one's fellow co-religionist but everyone who does the will of God, giving to the point of excess.

We could think about the miracle of the 10 lepers as completing the parable of the Good Samaritan. This time, it is the Samaritan who is wounded on the side of the road. He is a leper, ritually impure, and thus a social outcast. He is healed by Jesus and is the only one who comes back to give thanks to God.

This act of gratitude is linked to Naaman's healing at the hands of Elisha. Naaman is a commander of the Syrian army, not a son of Israel. He is healed of his leprosy and comes back to Elisha to give thanks. He wants to give him something.

Elisha refuses. Instead, Naaman asks for two mule-loads of dirt from Elisha to offer sacrifice. He believes that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is attached to the very dirt where he is standing, confined to a place. And thus, he wants to take this dirt home with him, to worship God in Syria.

The Samaritan no longer needs to ask for this dirt, because he

stands in the very presence of this God. He adores Jesus, lying prostrate before him. He places his face in the dirt, discovering the presence of God not attached to the land but to the person of Jesus.

So, yes, we Christians should give thanks to God for all things. But we should also recognize that because of Jesus, the vocation to give thanks is not reserved just to our little parish, our little tribe of Christians.

Jesus Christ is to be worshipped throughout all lands, in all places.

Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D., is the director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame.