

From the Pastor's Desktop

A Scripture Reflection from Father Charles Puthota

October 9, 2022



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

A boy slipped and fell into a raging river. He was about to drown, when, fortunately, a man walking by plunged into the water and saved him. Later, in the hospital, after regaining consciousness, the boy said to the man, "Thank you, sir, for saving my life." The man replied: "That's okay, sonny, but live in such a way that your life was worth saving."

Gratitude is expressed in words. Often, we measure a person's good manners by the word "thank you." We delight in teaching little children to say thank you. A common disappointment is when others do not say thank you. However, we know that it is easier to say thanks than to live a grateful life. Saying thank you is important, but "doing" thanks is essential. If individuals and nations can live from a grateful heart, the whole world would be transformed.

The Word of God spotlights the necessity of the attitude of gratitude. Having been cleansed of leprosy, Naaman the Syrian is filled with gratitude. He wants to do a concrete act of thanks. But Prophet Elisha disappoints him by refusing to profit from the act of healing. All the Syrian can do now is to haul off "two mule-loads of earth" back to his land. It is his way of doing thanks. But more importantly, he realizes that he "will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god except the Lord." From now on, he will give thanks by living a life of witness to the incredible healing God has given him.

In the gospel, after the healing, the Samaritan alone comes "glorifying God in a loud voice" and falls "at the feet of Jesus" and thanks him. Jesus' question "Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God" might seem as if Jesus was fishing for gratitude. It is not so. Jesus wants thanks to be given to God. What the other nine missed by not thanking God is the opportunity to be sent out on a mission by the Son of God: "Stand up and go: your faith has saved you." Now the healed Samaritan has to live a life of the "wounded healer." His life now will show it was worth saving---by the Savior himself.

Doing gratitude is made possible by God who removes the boundaries between the insider and outsider. Naaman, the Syrian, an outsider, becomes an insider by embracing faith. The Samaritan, too, in the gospel becomes an insider like the rest of the disciples of Jesus who are sent out on his mission to heal and transform the world. The Incarnation is the ultimate mystery of God becoming the insider. Living thanks means breaking down barriers between insider and outsider and building up the universality of love and service.

Doing thanks will also spring from striking a balance between the individual and community. As a healed man, Naaman is fully restored to his community where he would enjoy his rights and privileges. The lepers in the gospel who had been shunned as untouchables are restored their rightful place in society. Jesus looks at each leper as if he were the only one in the whole world to love. But Jesus is also eager to restore them to community and society. We are individuals at our best when we are an integral part of community. The Kingdom of God is Jesus' vision of the new community.

Jesus' approach to law and love in the healing story of the lepers inspires us about doing thanks. Jesus allows the ostracized lepers to interact with him, though the law had banished them as outcasts. He allows the Samaritan to come into his presence, even though the Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with each other. Time and again, especially in the Sabbath healings, we see Jesus choosing love over the law. Sabbath is made for us, not the other way around. Jesus shocks his contemporaries by eating with sinners and tax-collectors. The greatest commandment is that of love. In Jesus Christ there is only one law: the law of love. It is to love God and others. All other laws are subservient to the law of love. Is it possible that at times we are so eager to follow rules and laws that we neglect love? Doing thanks necessarily will entail our living by the law of love.

Let us say thanks to those who planted flowers by planting flowers ourselves. We shall grow fruit trees as a way of giving thanks to those who have offered us fruits. The way we can truly do thanks for life is by sharing it with others. Let thanks be always on our lips and in our deeds.

Your Friend and Pastor,

Father Charles Puthota