

Lk 17:11-19; 2 Kgs 5:14-17; 2 Tm 2:8-13 A Grateful Heart

There are two ways of living your life: One is as if nothing is a gift; the other is as if everything is a gift from God.

My life has been a gift from God! Never in my wildest dreams did I want to be a priest. Yet, out of nowhere, came that most beautiful desire! And becoming a priest was the most wonderful thing that ever happened in my life.

And so, I am eternally grateful. So much so, that when I die, I hope my gravestone will say: *Deo Gratias*, which means *Thanks Be to God!*

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to embrace His passion. He was met by 10 lepers (Lk 17:12). Leprosy was contagious (no cure).

Disfigured like monsters, they had to live in caves, dress in rags, and cry out “unclean, unclean!” (Lev 13:45). Even worse, the law of Moses said God was punishing them for their sins (Dt 28:15, 35).

From a distance the lepers cried out (like we do in Mass) *Kyrie! Eleison!* Jesus Master! Have pity on us! (Lk 17:13).

And pity it was, which He gave to them: *Go show yourselves to the priests.* And on their way, they were healed (Lk 17:14).

What does that mean for us? Our leprosy is sin. Like leprosy, sin (makes us unworthy) separates us from God and from each other.

Jesus offers us the same gift of love and mercy--to forgive us our sins, to reconcile us with God, and with each other. But are we humble enough to accept it?

In the first reading, Naaman, a Syrian army commander caught leprosy. The prophet Elisha sent him a message to bathe in the Jordan 7 times.

That was an insult! Why couldn't Elisha just pray over him? But Naaman humbled himself. He obeyed. He was healed. Not only that. By becoming humble, he was transformed.

We become humble when we come to confession, when we come to mass, and when we surrender completely our will to the will of God. It will transform us.

We become aware that God is all in all, the core and center of our being. We begin thanking God constantly, moment by moment, for who we are and for what He has given us.

But only one of the lepers, a Samaritan, returned to give thanks to Jesus (Lk 17:15). And for that, Jesus gave him an even greater gift...the gift of everlasting life: *Stand up and go; your faith has saved you* (Lk 17:19).

Why? Because the Samaritan accepted the gift of God's love and mercy. And then he gave it back to Jesus. Whereas the other 9 lepers kept God's gift for themselves.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the gift...about how the suffering servant became a leper for us:

*So marred was his look beyond that of man* (Isa 52:14); *He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity* (Isa 53:3).

*Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured* (Isa 53:4). *If he gives his life as an offering for sin...the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him* (Isa 53:10)...

*Because...through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear* (Isa 53:11).

That is the gift. He became a leper for us...to suffer and die... to heal us from something much worse than Leprosy...to heal us from our sins.

That is why it's so important to come to mass...to give Him thanks. Here, is where we give thanks to God, by giving back to God what God has given us!

On that cross God gave us His suffering, His betrayal, His abandonment...and yet He gave us His heart. And now, in this mass, we are going to give our heart back to God.

How? Like He did for us: through love!

Through Him, with Him and in Him...may we be so blessed, as to use the gift He has given us:

His love, His mercy and His compassion now inside of us...to love, forgive, serve and embrace all the lepers in this world.

Because like He said: *whatever you did for one of these least brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did [it] for me* (Mt 25:40).

St. Paul said so in the second reading. In chains and on his way to face certain death he said:

*I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus* (2 Tm 2:10).

In other words, by offering up our suffering, our prayers, and our sacrifices for others, we become co-redeemers with Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for the salvation of the world!

Let us pray: Create in me O Lord, a grateful heart. A heart broken for You. A heart broken with You. A heart compassionate, merciful and understanding.

A heart made holy in suffering, prayers and sacrifice.

And most of all, a heart most grateful for the gift of sharing—so that what You have done for me (on that cross)—now I can do that for others.