

28th Sunday in the Ordinary Time C
Gratitude is the Memory of the Heart

2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 98:1,2-3,3-4; 2 Tim. 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have a familiar saying: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart." Only those who remember and acknowledge what they receive or encounter as a gift can truly express gratitude. Naaman, in our first reading, perfectly captures this sentiment after he is cured of leprosy, much like one of the ten lepers in the Gospel who returned to thank Jesus and became His disciple.

Leprosy is a severe affliction that has historically resulted in complete social isolation. We recall the lepers on Molokai, where Father Damien provided care and support. This illness imposes a heavy burden, forcing those affected to distance themselves from healthy individuals and associate only with other lepers. As a result, being a leper meant being an outcast from society.

It is not surprising that Naaman traveled from Syria to Israel in search of a cure. Despite being a commander in the Syrian army, he was willing to enter enemy territory. He allowed himself to be humbled by plunging into the river, rather than expecting a noble ceremony of healing from Elisha. This likely represented his last hope with his imperfect faith. To his amazement, he was instantly and completely healed. Overwhelmed with gratitude for God, he loaded his cart with soil from the Holy Land to create an altar at home dedicated to the God of Israel. From that day forward, he vowed to worship no other god (cf. 2 Kings 5:14-17). Naaman realized he owed a debt of gratitude to God that he could never fully repay, and his thankfulness inspired him to change his life.

In contrast, St. Paul expresses his gratitude for being loved by God, forgiven, chosen, and sent on a mission. He always remembers Jesus as the source of all he is and sees everything as a blessing from God, including his trials. Genuine gratitude does not depend on comfort; it relies on trust. A grateful heart does not wait for life to be perfect before saying thank you. It expresses thanks even when life is challenging because God is trustworthy. Thus, Paul reminded Timothy to always remember Jesus and be faithful to Him, laboring in His name (cf. 2 Tim. 2:8-13).

The story of the leper who returned to thank Jesus serves as a powerful reminder of the joy that comes from giving thanks. Instead of celebrating with friends and family, he chose to express his gratitude to Jesus first. By returning, he fully embraced the benefits of his encounter with Jesus. His body was healed, his spirit was transformed, and he became a faithful disciple of Jesus. In contrast, the other nine lepers missed out on something significant; their failure to express appreciation kept their blessings to themselves and left them with nothing to give back. They overlooked the incredible richness and inner joy that gratitude brings.

The stories we heard serve as gentle reminders that our basic posture before God should always be one of praise and thanksgiving. We express this most clearly during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, particularly during the Preface. This is known as the Great Thanksgiving prayer because the word "Eucharist" literally means "thanksgiving." During this prayer, we engage in a prayerful dialogue: the priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God," and we respond, "It is right to give Him thanks and praise." The priest continues, "Father, it is our duty and our salvation always and everywhere to give you thanks." And why? Not just because something good may have happened during the week or due to any specific event, but because of our constant, unchanging, and permanent state of being alive and saved by the healing, merciful, forgiving, and sustaining presence of God right here and now in the world.

The true worth of our love for God stems from our ability to recognize and appreciate His blessings. Being grateful or saying thank you is not just good manners; it is a way of life. It is a sign of faith in God. The more we are aware of and thankful to Him, the more open we will be to receiving the joy of His providential care. As our patron St. Therese said, "It is the spirit of gratitude which draws down upon us the overflow of God's grace." When we live in gratitude, we serve with joy, not complaint; we give generously, not begrudgingly; we see God's grace even in trials.

In his book "No Man Is an Island," Thomas Merton writes, "If we are not grateful to God, we cannot taste the joy of finding Him in creation. To be ungrateful is to admit that we do not know Him and that we love His creatures not for His sake but for our own." Unless we express gratitude for our existence, we cannot fully understand who we are or appreciate the meaning of being alive. The only true value of our lives lies in the fact that they are gifts from God.

Gratitude means remembering, celebrating, and paying it forward. It is the memory of the heart!

Fr. Manny Hewe, Pastor