

There are many people in our society today who forget the magic words “Thank you.” Such people believe they have earned every good that comes their way and, therefore, do not need to thank anyone or any God for it. The question put to us today is: **Do we realize the hidden power of God at work in our lives?** In the lives of our friends? In the ones we know and who are close us?

- What did we do to merit being born alive while thousands of children are born dead or terminated?
- What did you do to deserve loving parents while many people never had any?
- What did you do to have eyes to see, ears to hear, tongue to speak, feet to walk, that some people among us do not have?
- How much did you pay God to make you such an intelligent and beautiful person? Think of the many wonderful teachers, friends, and relations that you have had and that you still have.

We take our blessings for granted. **Emerson once said that if the stars came out only once a year, everybody would stay up all night to behold them.** We have seen the stars so often that we don't bother to look at them anymore. How easily we grow accustomed to our blessings and forget to give thanks for them. How often we tell someone, “What a wonderful day” When we should be saying: “God, Thank you for this wonderful day.”

Two of our readings today feature striking examples of gratitude. In our first reading we have Naaman, a Syrian Army General, who is cured of leprosy through the intervention of the prophet, Elisha. He goes back to the prophet to express his gratitude. The gospel recounts Jesus' cure of ten lepers, one of whom – a Samaritan – returns to give thanks.

Both examples manifest the spirit of God present and active in unexpected people and places. Naaman is a Gentile, a citizen of Syria, a nation hostile to, and hated by, the Israelites. Yet, in his time of dire need, and on the advice of an Israelite maidservant, he seeks out a prophet from Israel, Elisha. Then, humbly obeying the prophet's command, he bathes himself seven times in the river Jordan – and is cleansed of his leprosy. With a heart full of gratitude, he returns to Elisha and gives thanks to the God of Israel in words that manifest a spiritual transformation as well as a physical healing: **‘Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel’.**

Naaman **believed** the word of the prophet and **obeyed**. That is when faith becomes effective. Surely this is a lesson for our own lives too. This world has no shortage of faith but a critical shortage of those who ‘obey’ their faith. **Let's always remember: It's not medicine until you take it. It's not food until you eat it. It's not faith until you practice it.**

The central character in our gospel reading is a grateful Samaritan despised by the Jews. He is one of ten lepers healed by Jesus. He too believed and obeyed, and he was healed. The point of the story is that this despised ‘*foreigner*’ is the only one who returns to thank Jesus and give praise to God. Jesus acknowledges that the healing of the Samaritan leper is more than skin deep. He is made whole in body and spirit. Hence, Jesus says to him: **‘Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you’.**

Both Naaman and the grateful Samaritan show that genuine gratitude flows from hearts open to the presence and action of God's spirit, faith-filled hearts. Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us truly grateful, as was the case with Naaman and the Samaritan. When things are going well, we can easily take our blessings for-granted.

All of you who have had or who have little ones at home, children, or siblings, know what I am is talking about. *Mine* is one of the first words that babies learn to say consistently. Everything a toddler sees becomes *Mine*. That might be OK for a three-year-old, but some people go through life seeing themselves as the center of the universe. To some people, everything is *Mine*. Life for them is "all about me, my feelings, my needs, my success, my happiness." Some people never grow up.

Growing up is about learning new words: *Yes, Ours, Yours, please*, and perhaps the hardest phrase to learn and to mean, *Thank you*. "Thank you for caring about me. Thank you for worrying about me. Thank you for being my friend. Thank you for loving me, despite myself." When we say *Thank you*, we realize that we are not the center of the universe. When we say "thank you" we realize that what we are and what we have are the result of a goodness and beauty beyond ourselves.

Once upon a time, there was a far-away land that was ruled by a vicious king. His iron hand reached into every corner of his subjects' lives. Every corner - except one. With all his power, he couldn't destroy their belief in God. In his frustration, he finally summoned his advisors and asked them: "Where can I hide God so the people will end up forgetting about him?" One suggested hiding God on the dark side of the moon. This idea was debated but was voted down because the advisors feared that their scientists would one day discover a way to travel into space travel and God would be discovered again.

Another suggested burying God in the deepest part of the ocean. But there was the same problem with this idea, so it was voted down. One idea after another was suggested and debated and rejected. Until finally the oldest and wisest advisor had a flash of insight. "I know," he said, "why don't we hide God where no one will ever even think to look?" And he explained, "If we hide God in the ordinary events of people's everyday lives, they'll never find him!" And so, it was done. And they say people in that land are still looking for God - even today.

Many Christians today do not attend Sunday worship. More than anything, this is a sign that we have become an ungrateful people. This is so because the main reason why Christians come together on Sunday is to give thanks to God. The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word meaning "thanksgiving." If we count our blessing, if we realize that all is from above, then we shall be more likely to act like the Samaritan leper who realized he was healed – to return with joy and give God thanks and praise –every Sunday.

God Bless You.