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Thanksgiving - Are You Grateful?

by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio



Leprosy is a dreadful thing anywhere, anytime. But in the ancient Near East, it was a particularly heavy burden to bear since it meant complete social isolation. You could, of course, hang out with other lepers. But you were bound to stay far away from the healthy as possible lest they be contaminated with your disease. To be a leper was to be an outcast.



No wonder, then, that Naaman would travel all the way from his native Syria to Israel when told that there was hope of finding a cure there. So what if Israel was the enemy of Syria and he was a Syrian army commander? So what if he worshiped Syrian gods rather than the God of Israel? It was worth a shot. Nothing else

had worked.

Namaan was healed instantly and completely. And his response was just matter-of-fact. He was obliged to express his gratitude by offering a gift. Elisha refused to accept it because the healing had not come from Elisha. It had come from God. When Naaman recognized this, he loaded up a cart with soil from the Holy Land so that he could erect an altar at home to the God of Israel. And he pledged to worship no other god from that day forward.

Namaan was a pagan. He probably never heard of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20) which starts off with "I am the Lord your God and you shall not have any strange gods before me." But Naaman did not need Divine Revelation to tell him what he already knew by way of common sense. He had just received a new lease on life from the God of his enemies. From that moment on, he realized he owed a debt of gratitude to this God that could never fully be repaid, but he was bound to try anyway. None of the other "gods" had been able to give him his life back. They had no power to do so and he owed them nothing. Naaman was a just man and so was determined to pay what he owed as best as he could.



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How ironic! Israel had experienced extraordinary blessings from God for hundreds of years but failed to express gratitude to God. Instead, they flirted with the idols that Namaan abandoned. Rather than honoring the prophets, they persecuted them.



We see a similar irony in Luke's story of the 10 lepers (Luke 17:11-19). An encounter with Jesus brings these ten outcasts total healing and restoration to society. Yet none of the Israelites among them takes the time to return to thank Jesus. Only one man does –and he just happens to be a Samaritan heretic.

Worship of God first and foremost is a strict obligation of justice. We were created out of nothing, through no effort of our own. We were saved by grace; it was not our own doing (Ephesians 2:4). On both counts, we owe God everything. We can never adequately repay him, and so owe him a lifetime of gratitude. That's why [Abraham Lincoln](#) proclaimed an annual holiday of Thanksgiving in America. That's why we Catholics speak of our "Sunday obligation." We are bound, if we are able, to observe the third commandment and keep the Lord's Day holy by gathering together to give thanks. Eucharist, by the way, means thanksgiving. In the ancient dialogue between priest and people that introduces the Eucharistic (thanksgiving) prayer, we say "it is right to give Him thanks and praise" ("right and just" in the ancient versions).

Why must we discharge this obligation at Mass rather than in the comfort of our own homes? Because our sacrifice of thanksgiving is weak and insufficient on its own. There was only One who has ever offered perfect worship to the Father, and His sacrifice is made present again at every Eucharist. Our inadequate "thanks" is absorbed into the perfect sacrifice of praise offered by the Son much like the drop of insipid water the priest puts in the chalice is absorbed into the rich wine that becomes Christ's blood.



But thanksgiving can't be limited to Sunday Eucharist. We are called to develop a lifestyle of thanksgiving. We're called to become a Eucharistic people.

This originally appeared in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection on the scripture readings for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle C (2 Kgs 5:14-17; Ps 98; 2 Tim 2:8-13; Lk 17:11-19) and is reproduced here by permission of the author.

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