

**28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)**  
**(2Kings 5:14-17 / Luke 17:11-19)**  
**13.10.2013**

### **Gratitude**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Only one of the ten lepers cured “turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him”. Only one!

**Gratitude** is not something that most of us practice spontaneously **in our relationship with God**. When we pray to the Lord, we are more inclined to ask for his help, to bring our needs before him or to present our petitions for others to him than we are to offer him our praise and thanksgiving for who he is and what he has done for us. Indeed we are often quite slow to recognize the many blessings that have come to us from his hands. When we come before the Lord in prayer, we more readily grumble and complain about our situation. And if our prayer is not answered immediately, we voice our complaint. And yet we have so many reasons for which to be grateful, so many things for which we should be thankful: the gift of life itself, the many relationships we enjoy within our families and communities and with our friends, our vocation, our talents and abilities, our accomplishments and achievements, our work, our health, the leisure time we enjoy, our hidden life of communion with the Lord in prayer, the beauty of nature that surrounds us... Yes, there is so much to be grateful for and yet we so rarely express our gratitude for many of these things.

Of course, the picture of our lives is not always as beautiful as I have just depicted it. Our day-to-day experience of life is not always easy; it is usually quite a mixed bag of blessings and burdens. We are probably fine with the idea of giving praise to God for the blessings received, but what about those moments when life is hard and there is no likely prospect of any great improvement in the immediate future? What about those times when our patience and endurance are being tried? Are we ready to praise God then? It is true that trials abound in our lives. Many difficult situations could be evoked: We could think of those of us who have lost a loved one recently, those who have been bereaved prematurely or through the violent death of someone they cared for. We could think of those who are unemployed or have to struggle with poor health. Nevertheless, the point is made in the Scriptures that we must “thank the Lord at all times, his praise always on our lips”. That is easier said than done. And yet it is undeniable that we are called to be grateful to God not only when things are going well for us, but also when the going is tough and we are led to traverse difficulties of all sorts. *Gratitude to God is the fruit of faith*; it is not just the result of success, an optimistic temperament, or the approval and recognition of others. We should even be grateful to God when things go wrong because as Christians we give assent to the proposition of the apostle Paul that “God works with those who love him and turns everything to their good” (Rm 8:28). When things are going wrong, our faith asks us to believe that in God’s sight there is a purpose being worked out. The psalmist says: “It is good for me that you have made me low so that I

may know your commandments” (Ps 118:71-73). God reveals himself to us just as much through failures as through success. It is often easier to find God in hard times than when everything is going well. As Bishop Helder Camara wrote, “The Lord is there. He is far less likely to abandon us in hardship than in times of ease”.

All this leads us to recognize that our gratitude should know no limits. Whatever happens to us, the Lord is at work. He is at work within us and between us. This thought should encourage us to ask the Lord to deliver us from all our ingratitude in his regard.

If gratitude to God should be a hallmark of our lives, **gratitude in regard to others** should also be present in all our relationships. But we know from experience that we take so many things and so many people for granted. Nothing is so hurtful and painful as the neglect and coldness of those for whom we have done our best. We know what it feels like to be disregarded, forgotten and set aside. We are saddened when we are left without a word of acknowledgment and appreciation. On the other hand, we also know how good it feels when someone simply says thanks to us. I still remember a postcard that I received some twenty five years ago, when I was still a monk at the Abbey of Bec, from someone who had come to share her burden with me. We had spent one hour together. The following week a word of appreciation came in the post and I was deeply touched by it. It was the first time that I had received a written word of thanks for time spent listening to someone! ...I still remember it twenty five years later!... But let us be honest. While we are ready to deplore the ingratitude -or the simple lack of acknowledgment- we encounter in others, are we just as aware of our own ungratefulness? I hear the Word of God addressed to us today as an invitation to be more ready to express our gratitude to the Lord and to each other.

Let us look for a moment at something else that is flagged up to us in today’s gospel passage. We note that the one who came back to thank the Lord was **a Samaritan**. We can presume that the others were Jews. We know that there were no dealings between Jews and Samaritans. Probably the Jews of Jesus’ time would have said of the Samaritan: ‘He is not one of ours’. Clearly, Jesus did not reason in the same way. He cured the Samaritan along with the nine Jews. So, let us be careful about the way we regard others and speak of them! When we say of someone: ‘He is not one of ours’ we can be sure that Jesus would not have spoken or thought like that. When we hold people at a distance, when we think of them that ‘they are not one of ours’, we are not displaying a truly Christian attitude.

It is certainly worth noting that in today’s gospel passage the man who came back to Jesus was a Samaritan, that is to say a stranger, an outsider – maybe even an enemy. It was not one of Jesus’ own people who proved himself a true disciple to Jesus, and showed us what the right Christian attitude should be. At this point, we cannot but think of the gospel parable of the Good Samaritan, in which the Jewish Priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road, but a Samaritan came to the help of the man in need. The Samaritan showed himself to be a true disciple, animated with loving care and concern for the man left lying half-dead by the wayside. In both Scripture passages –

today's gospel story and the parable of the Good Samaritan –, it is a Samaritan who shows us the right way to act.

Perhaps there is a lesson for us living here in Northern Ireland. Maybe some of us need to learn that true discipleship can be revealed to us by Christians of other denominations. Mature and responsible political behaviour can be shown to us by people from another political background than our own. Sitting here comfortably in church on a Sunday morning, we may consent to those affirmations and say that they are quite right, but how do we react in our ordinary, everyday lives and in our normal conversations? It is often in these situations when we are caught off-guard that our deepest convictions appear.

May the Lord grant us grateful and compassionate hearts! May the Lord grant us Samaritan hearts! May he open our eyes and ears to recognize the prophetic presence of Samaritans by our sides – those who come from beyond our religious denomination or political allegiance and who show us true Christian attitudes at work!