

Gratitude

Readings Zechariah 2:14-17; Luke 17:11-19

July 2, 2023

I wonder what happened to the nine lepers
 who did not go back to thank Jesus?
Did their minds immediately turn to other needs,
 newer preoccupations, more urgent petitions?
Did they just move on with their lives, now cured of leprosy
 but worried about something else?
Did they remember how it was when they were kept at a distance
 and how much they longed to be healed of their deformity.

Maybe, if they had kept a journal of those days,
 they could have turned back the pages to forgotten times
 when they cried out for pity or begged for help.
They might have remembered how they once thought
 their whole world would be charged with light,
 if they could be healed with their skin as fresh as a child's.
They would have compared their old feelings
 about their affliction and their new freedom,
 having now won their hearts desire.

There are times when we seem to go through life
 the way some children go through birthday presents.
We tear through the wrapping paper of our gifts,
 pilling up the boxes as we move on the next bright toy.
Perhaps we shake an envelope without reading the message
 or knowing who it is from.
What's next? Is that all?

This perpetual flitting of our interest, this inability to rest in the gift,
 occurs also in matter of health.
We might fret through the night,
 thinking our cold is pneumonia,

the cold sore is cancer,
the next day of exams is treacherous.
In a matter of hours, the jeopardy may pass
and we forget the gifts as we begin to brood on something else.

Why is it we charge through life so unaware of our million deliverances?
Do we appreciate our rescues or healings even a tenth of the time?
If we could count the fears, both small and large, that once hounded us,
and then thank God for each dreaded outcome never met,
we would reach no end to gratitude.

The truth is, we will not take full possession of our lives
until we learn to give thanks for them.
We don't really own our legs, our eyes, our hands and skin
unless we're daily grateful.
We don't really live with those we say we love,
unless we foster an appreciation for their presence.
It is only the loss of them - or the threat of it - that shakes us
into an awareness of their many gifts.

But when we do wake up from our sleepwalking,
when we see the wonder of the smallest parts of our existence,
we begin to live.
It is then we know what it is like, with the tenth leper, to be saved.

Perhaps the most grateful person I've ever heard of
was an old woman in an extended care hospital.
She had some kind of wasting disease,
her different powers fading away over the march of months.
A college school student I knew,
who was working as a volunteer at the hospital,
happened to visit her one day.
She kept going back to see her,
she was so drawn by the strange force of the woman's joy.
Though she could no longer move her arms and legs,

she would say: "I'm just so happy I can move my neck."
When she could no longer move her neck, she would say:
"I'm just glad I can hear and see."

When the young student finally asked the old woman
what would happen if she lost her sense of sound and sight,
the gentle lady said: "I'll just be grateful that you come to visit."

Gratitude not only empowers the receiver of the gift,
it confirms the giver.

"You really do believe I love you," the giver says in the heart.
It is truly wondrous when others actually believe you love them.
It is glorious when someone thanks you.

I'm sure the nine lepers were appreciative
of Jesus curing them of leprosy.

But why they never bothered
to show their gratitude to Jesus, we'll never know.

We can only look to ourselves to ask
why we are often reluctant to say thank you.

Sometimes it's because we resent the fact
that we needed help in the first place;
Sometimes we are suspicious of people's goodness
And wonder about their motives.

Whatever the reason for our own ingratitude,
We know that it diminishes us and those who help us.

INGRATITUDE MAKES THE BILL
FOR HELPING PEOPLE HARD TO PICK UP.

I think God is more interested in our gratitude than anything else.
After all, was not Adam and Eve's first sin ingratitude?

Christ, having healed ten lepers,
saw something greater in the one Samaritan
who came back, fell at his feet, and praised God.

He saw the splendor of a human heart
that believes that it is loved,
and accepts the gift.

Such faith not only brings salvation.

It is a gift given back to God,

a gift so enchanting that God would die for love of it.