

A Grateful Heart

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Thanksgiving; Thankfulness / Luke 17:11–19

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Happy Thanksgiving! What are you thankful for this year? That is a question that is being asked and answered across our country today for those that are celebrating the annual Thanksgiving Day holiday? Our text is the appointed gospel lesson for a day of National Thanksgiving. Why the cleansing of the lepers? We know the story well. Jesus meets Ten Lepers, they cried out to the Lord and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” Jesus answered to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” That’s what healed lepers had to do, they had to be declared clean by the priest. Another miracle by Jesus showing that He is the Great Physician and healer of the body as well as the soul. The story continues when one of them, when he saw that was healed turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. We also learn that the one that returned was a Samaritan.

Jesus goes on to say to this Samaritan, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return to give praise except this foreigner?” Concluding the recorded conversation, Jesus says, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

Familiar story for today! Did you know that this is only time that the Greek Word for thanksgiving Eucharisto refers to the giving of thanks to Jesus. And it’s a foreigner who gives thanks to Jesus!

This thankful and grateful heart has been given to him by the Lord God to respond with worship and thanks to Jesus.

But what about the other nine?

The Other Nine

The other nine I'm sure are indeed thankful. Thankful for being healed. Who wouldn't be? They can go back to life as normal in society. They don't have to be seen as outcasts and unclean. They saw Jesus as Master, they saw him as someone who could give them what they wanted or perhaps needed. They probably have even knew of him healing others or perhaps someone close to them. They cried out for the mercy of Jesus looking for him to dispense a favor to them. They were looking to the Master, as the divine vending machine to give them a favor. Then they would go on living their lives. These nine lepers were thinking all about themselves. Thankful, sure. Thankful to Jesus...no way. Did they have a grateful heart? I don't think so.

Needless to say we can compare the 9 "thankful" lepers to a majority of Americans and you on this day. How are they giving thanks today? How are you giving thanks today? I'm sure many have been in church last night and this morning to give "thanks". What about after service? You might even forget to keep on giving thanks to Jesus. You will probably join the majority of Americans on a day when you seem to get permission to overeat and be all around lazy with turkey and football. Then if you get a desire to walk off some of the calories, you'll go and indulge on even more materialistic and selfish culture of our country with the Thanksgiving Black Friday sales that are already going on online and some stores might even be open now. It seems that Thanksgiving has turned more into selfish gluttony than gracious thanksgiving. Remember the Pilgrims first thanksgiving was to give Thanks to God for his bounty.

This National Thanksgiving does not focus itself on the thankfulness that the foreigner had for Jesus. It doesn't encourage us to give thanks to Jesus for what he has done and how he saved us and made us well. Yes, we are given many blessings, but many times we like the others are just seeking that God who is a divine vending machine and when we cry out to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," we hope that he will get us out of our troubles and then go on living with our selfish, self-centered hearts.

Indeed, you and I can be very ungrateful. We can forget to thanks to God for all the good that he gives to us, including healing and saving us. You and I can be self-centered. It's ingrained into our very being. It's ingrained into our lives, not just in American culture, but also into the world that we were born into, a sinful-broken world, where people have been looking out for themselves since Adam and Eve fell into sin.

And yes, in today's text we see 9 selfish healed lepers who might have been thankful, but really had no grateful heart, there was no thanksgiving to Jesus for his mighty act of care and concern for them. Out of the ten lepers who cried out "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," only one returned, when he realized the great blessing that was received. This very well could have been after the priest declared him clean. Or it could have been as Dr. Just in his commentary states: "It is possible that the Samaritan never made it to the temple, for when he saw that he was healed, he realized that the locale of God's presence had shifted from the temple in Jerusalem

to the body of Jesus.” We will never know on this side of heaven when this leper realized he was clean. When he did, he knew where to go.

The One Leper

Jesus told the leper, “Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.” This leper was indeed given faith, which then produced a heart of gratitude. It produced a heart of thanks for Jesus. His posture was one of worship. His worship confesses his faith about God in Jesus Christ. Was this leper thankful for the healing he received? Absolutely! Was this leper thankful for the blessings that he was given? Absolutely? Was this foreigner given faith which produced the grateful heart? Absolutely! He realized that being thankful isn’t a general thought, this healed leper, this foreigner realized that the place to give thanks for cleaning is wherever Jesus is.

That’s the absolute truth, this cleansed leper realized that one is to give thanks to Triune God for the blessings that he bestows. And for this leper it was initially for his physical healing, yet, Jesus told him, that his faith “saved him” as the Greek word is translated.

This foreign cleansed leper is genuinely thankful to Christ, for his work of cleansing. And you too are foreign. You are strangers in this land. And you too have been healed. You have been healed by your Master. Even this Thanksgiving Morning, you have Cried “Lord, have mercy” in the kyrie. You have sought out your Lord to have mercy, not just on your physical needs and wants, but you also have come before the throne of grace seeking his mercy for your spiritual needs. You have come to seek his mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Today, you have received that life-saving gift once again. Today, in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgave you of your sins. This morning, even before you go home to your thanksgiving feasts, you are going to join with a much larger family, you are going to join with the countless pilgrim throng as you come to this Eucharistic Feast and you will like the Cleansed Leper fall prostrate before the presence of the crucified and risen Lord, who gives his body and blood for you and your cleansing. You will once again prostrate yourself in humble thanksgiving to your Lord and Master, the one who provides you with perfect and full healing.

My fellow Americans, we don’t gather today in the Lord’s house because of a proclamation from the President of the United States that created a holiday to help us to be thankful at least one day out of the year. That’s not the point of today. The point for today is that we do gather, as dearly loved Saints, not as Americans, but as Saints, as members of the Kingdom of God, before our King, our Lord and Master, to once again give thanks to our God who is the provider of every good and perfect gift. And our thankfulness doesn’t just happen on one day of the year, on the fourth Thursday of November. No, on this day, we are reminded once again, that

our thankfulness is year round for as the apostle urges us, "Be thankful in all circumstances." This doesn't just mean in times of plenty, but also in times of want.

Dear fellow Saints of the Crucified and Risen Lord of Glory, just like the healed leper, the one who is a foreigner. You have been given faith in the Son of God. Through that faith, you have been given a grateful heart, one that has the ability through faith in Christ, to give thanks each day of the year, for the bounteous blessings of God, both his first article gifts and also the gifts of the second and third article...the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and the gifts that we have through the community of believers. Praise be God that we are in the presence of our King, the rightful place to give God thanks. This is what the cleansed leper was led to see and because of that he heard and so do you, "Rise and Go, your faith has made you well." "Rise and Go, your faith has saved you." "Rise and Go, to live our your life in thankful praise to the Lord and Master."

IN Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.